

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

**Lesson 17**

The Companions of the Stone, as a magical Order organized in the midst of the current esoteric renaissance, has had the responsibility of choosing from among a wide range of traditional and modern practices, teachings, and approaches to the world. In many cases the choices to be made were straightforward ones, but certain decisions involved a broad range of issues. One of these latter was the Order's decision regarding the traditional relationship between Western magical Orders and the society surrounding them.

Here the Western esoteric tradition differs sharply from its partial equivalents in other cultures -- the shamanic systems of tribal peoples, say, or the esoteric schools of great Eastern faiths such as Buddhism and Taoism. These traditions, in the past and at present, play active parts in their respective cultures, with well-defined and highly visible social roles. In the West, by contrast, esoteric traditions have existed on the fringes of society, in as much secrecy as possible. This secrecy has been so pervasive that one common term for the esoteric realm of knowledge -- "occult" -- literally means nothing more than "hidden."

**Secrecy**

In every culture, the magician exists in a border zone, a space between the socially constructed world and the unknown. Some societies establish a special occupation (such as "shaman") for those who inhabit this zone, and value them; others declare the zone a no man's land and do their best to punish or kill those who set foot in it. American culture at present does neither of these. Pulled between incompatible systems of thought -- scientific, which sees magic as crazy; orthodox religious, which sees it as evil; alternative religious, which sees it as possible; and folk, which has always assumed its existence and power -- our society has yet to come up with a generally acceptable way to define the zone and react to its inhabitants.

To some extent, this gives the magician today an unusual

freedom, the freedom to define his or her own place and role in the world. It may be inappropriate, though, to celebrate this too much, or too soon. Similar periods of social uncertainty have come and gone before.

Traditionally, magicians in the West have tended to practice their art at a level of secrecy we might more easily associate with espionage or organized crime. False names, passwords and signs, blood oaths and the like came into common use in the Western esoteric tradition in this way. These things were necessary in the days when even the suspicion of magical involvement could lead to torture and death; they continued to be useful later, when such a suspicion was enough to destroy careers and risk criminal charges or confinement for insanity.

This level of security seems excessive at present, in a country where religious freedom is perhaps more general than ever before in history. There have accordingly been a number of recent figures in the magical community who have roundly condemned the whole apparatus of traditional magical secrecy.

At the same time, there is something to be said for some of the technical devices of security which have become part of the tradition during the long years of hiding. The methods used for security in Western magical circles, particularly in the magical Orders of the last three hundred years, have taken on unexpected roles in esoteric practice. Thus the idea of taking a false name, sensible enough in its own context, has developed into the custom of choosing a magical name or motto to express one's aspirations in magic; passwords have taken on some of the functions of mantras; secret grips, used by magicians to identify each other in darkness, have come to be used as a way of linking energy prior to a group working. Over and above their function as a means of ensuring secrecy, these are effective magical techniques, and worth using in their own right.

On the other hand, there are still good reasons for a magician to choose to be quiet about his or her interests and practice. Some of these are psychological: the sense of isolation and focus created by a secret rigorously held can be a valuable tool for the magician in the work of transformation. So, also, can the taming of the ego involved in not parading one's status as a magician before all one's friends and acquaintances.

Other reasons are purely pragmatic. Although involvement in esoteric work is acceptable, even fashionable, in some countercultural circles, the levels of ignorance about magic in our culture as a whole are high enough to create suspicion and confused communication even when religious zealotry doesn't enter the picture. There are still parts of the United States

where it is not physically safe to be too well known as a practitioner of magic, and -- despite the optimism of some factions of the magical community -- it cannot be assumed that the opposition to magic in our culture will necessarily grow feebler with the passage of time.

It's worth recalling that twenty-five years ago, the idea that anti-abortion sentiment might lead to the firebombing of clinics and the murder of doctors would have seemed outlandish even to the most radical of abortion-rights activists. Similarly, it's not impossible that religious opposition to the current renaissance of magical traditions might take on increasingly militant and violent forms. It is even possible that the current broad tolerance for alternative spirituality in our culture might give way to more repressive attitudes. At the moment, neither of these seems especially likely, but predicting the future is always the riskiest of magical arts.

Finally, there is an esthetic of secrecy within the Western esoteric tradition, a part of the culture of Western magic that has come to use secrecy, invisibility and elusiveness as a kind of artistic medium.

There is, of course, a case to be made against the habit of secrecy, and it has been made ably by a range of modern magical writers. The Companions of the Stone, on the other hand, has been organized as a magical Order along traditional lines, and has chosen to retain much of the apparatus of secrecy and to require its members to practice discretion when speaking of the Order to nonmembers. In this it moves in opposition to some of the more visible trends in our culture, but in harmony with the tradition of which it is a part.

## **Exercises**

### Course Review

Last lesson's work included a review of the lessons you've already received, one part of the summing-up process that is an important part of this final unit of the course. In this lesson, you'll be continuing that process in a slightly different way.

Your task over the next two weeks will be to read through your magical record, starting with your first work on Lesson 1 and finishing with the most recent entries you've made. Notice the changes in the central practices of the course -- meditation,

the banishing ritual, and the like. Pay attention also to any changes you may perceive in the tone of the entries, and in the attitude to magic they express.

As always, anything you learn should be noted down in your magical record.

### Meditation

The meditative work given in last lesson's practice section represents a first step toward a wide range of magical techniques. The fusion of meditative and ritual actions in a visualized context, as we mentioned earlier, is central to a large part of the work of the modern magician; at the same time, some of the skills developed by this kind of exercise also have a central role in other types of magical working, notably the method of visionary work traditionally called "scrying in the spirit vision" but more often known at present under the somewhat inaccurate label of "Pathworking."

Most of these developments of the method cannot be touched on at this point because of simple lack of space. Many are covered in detail in books currently in print; most form a part of the further curriculum of the Companions of the Stone.

The meditation for this lesson expands on the material given in Lesson 16, and finishes laying the foundations for the final work of this course, which will be given in Lesson 18.

1. Begin as in last lesson's meditation, by banishing the space, entering into meditation, projecting the sphere of light and the lodge within the sphere from your solar plexus center, and performing the Lesser Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram in a visualized body. At the conclusion of this process, you are standing in the midst of a visualized magical lodge, with the four archangels present in the four thrones.

2. For the first week you spend on this lesson, remain at the altar, facing east, still in your visualized body. Then, perform a complete Middle Pillar exercise in that body. During this process you make no physical movement or sound; everything is done in visualization. When the exercise is finished, go on to Step 4.

3. For the second week you spend on this lesson, the work to be done will be rather different. At the beginning of each of these meditations, when you first visualize the lodge, include in the visualization a silver goblet standing at the center of the altar. When you go over to the altar to begin the invoking ritual, be aware that the goblet is filled with clear water.

Then, at the conclusion of the invoking ritual, remain at the altar, facing east. Still in your visualized body, raise your hands outward and up, above your head, and look upward toward the skylight above the altar. Say:

Come in the power of the Light;  
Come in the Light of Wisdom;  
Come in the mercy of the Light;  
The Light has healing in its wings!

At this point visualize a brilliant ray of light descending through the skylight to the goblet, shining on cup and water with blinding intensity. Hold this image for a time, and then allow the ray of light to fade. Then take the goblet in both hands, raise it to your lips, and drink. You should try to imagine the taste and feeling of the cool water as clearly as possible as your visualized body drinks part of the water. Set the goblet down, then, leaving it partly full, and go on to Step 4.

4. Finally, with the work of the meditation done, perform the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram in your visualized body, and then return to your seat and your physical body. Withdraw the lodge and the sphere of light back into your body, as before, and close as you usually close a meditation.

Once again, the act of withdrawing the visualized structure into your physical body must never be neglected.

This meditation should be performed every day during the two weeks you spend on this lesson.

#### Tarot Divination

For the next two weeks, continue with the Tarot divination practice as introduced in Lesson 15. Again, try to correlate the cards in the reading with the events of the day, and watch for recurring patterns both in the cards and in the events they reflect.

As before, this practice should be done each day.

#### Ritual

The ritual work of this lesson will be, again, the expanded form of the Middle Pillar exercise as given in Lesson 11. As mentioned in the last lesson, you may notice changes in this practice developing out of this unit's meditative work; these

changes may grow more pronounced with the addition of this lesson's meditation.

For one of the weeks you spend on this lesson, you will be doing the Middle Pillar twice each day, once physically and once nonphysically. This may also have certain effects.

Note down in your magical record anything of this sort you may perceive. Pay attention, also, to the differences in feeling and effect between the Middle Pillar exercise done in each of the two ways.

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 do 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.

## 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 magical record two accounts of your experiences with this lesson's meditation, one from the first week you spend on the lesson and one from the second week.

B. Copy out from your magical record one account of a performance of the physical Middle Pillar exercise you did as part of this lesson's work.

C. Copy out from your magical record one of your daily Tarot divinations, with your interpretation and commentary.

D. Describe some of the things you noticed while reviewing your magical record as part of the course review exercise.

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