

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

**Lesson 9**

The Tree of Life has become one of the core tools of Western esotericism because of its wide applicability. It is not, of course, the Tree as a diagram on a piece of paper, or even as a diagram generated by a specific method of construction, that it is so widely applicable. It is as a diagram that has come to be used in a very particular way.

Although this idea has been dealt with in our textbook, we want to bring it up again from another angle of approach. Anyone who studies classical Latin will be set, fairly early, to reading selected passages from certain standard authors -- from Caesar's Gallic War, for example, or from Virgil's Aeneid. By learning the language through studying a standard text, one learns much more than what is in the text, or the basic rules of the language. One learns, by example, how texts are written in that language, and how they are read.

In very much the same way, by working with the Tree, by unpacking layer after layer of information, and mode after mode of gaining access to that information, we learn more than just vast tables of correspondences. We learn to perform the kinds of activities that lead us to contact the realms of living experience of which those correspondences are the outer and visible signs. The point, after all, of reading Virgil is not to learn the rules of Latin grammar and poetry for their own sake, but for the sake of the ability they give, when one has made them one's own, to allow one to experience Virgil's poetry. When we work with the Tree, we learn to experience the realms for which it provides a coordinate system.

**Virtues and Vices**

One very important use to which the Tree can be put is for increasing self knowledge, and one of the most important tasks for any aspirant to esoteric training is to come to know oneself. This is one of the ways in which esoteric training parts ways with modern education: esoteric tradition has not the slightest interest in so-called "self-esteem," in providing, maintaining, or protecting a positive self-image -- nor a

negative one, nor any particular image at all. The point of esoteric training is to learn to see what is there to be seen, and not to flinch, slide, shiver, tap-dance, or otherwise turn away from it to some secondary representation.

On the most basic, down-home level, this means that we have to practice seeing ourselves clearly -- and this means we have to learn to discern our own virtues and vices. But before we can do that, we have to learn to recognize what virtues and vices are. And this is where the Tree is a very great help indeed.

The correspondences given for the Sephirah in The Mystical Qabalah include, among many other things, virtues and vices. This sort of listing of specific actions and qualities can be seen as the first, shallowest aspect of the Tree's analysis: a somewhat arbitrary set of characteristics, assigned to the Sephiroth according to the usual symbolic scheme. This corresponds, in many ways, to the sort of rule-following morality common to most established religions.

Within the bare lists, though, is a deeper governing principle. Consider three responses to a threat of lethal violence -- say, a belligerent drunk looking for trouble, with a knife in his hand. One response might be to pull out a .357 Magnum and pump the man full of lead from ten yards' distance. Another might be to cringe in the shadows, hoping not to be seen, and hurry away as quickly as possible, trying to ignore the screams of some poor innocent not so good at hiding. A third might be to face the man and, taking advantage of the effects of alcohol on his reactions, kick the knife from his hand or trap it, and him, with a painful but nonlethal jujutsu hold.

All three of these responses (and, of course, the situation itself) have to do with the part of life the Qabalah assigns to Geburah. The first response goes too far in the direction of Geburah, while the second does not go far enough; both cruelty and cowardice are, in their own way, extremes. Between them, expressing Geburah in an appropriate manner, is the third response: courage. Similarly, most other vices can best be seen not as the opposite of a virtue but as the opposite of another vice, with a virtue as a third factor in between.

The characteristic of the third response might be called harmony, or appropriateness; most modern Qabalistic writings would use the term "balance." Easier to experience than to define, it serves as the central theme of the Western esoteric approach to morality. It is, precisely, the Middle Pillar upon the Tree of Life, as well as the Middle Path between extremes.

It is worth noting, finally, that this third alternative has one

other characteristic: it often requires a significant amount of skill or special training. It would take far less knowledge and ability to empty a gun into our hypothetical drunk, or to hide behind a dumpster, than it would to disarm him in hand-to-hand combat. A respect for technical ability in any craft has been important in Western esoteric circles for centuries, and these considerations may help to explain one of the sources of that tradition.

### **Geburah: Will**

Although it's not as fashionable as it once was, "will-power" is something that still appears in many writings on magical and occult subjects. The word itself has a rather old-fashioned sound nowadays, and this is not entirely unfortunate, although it is also partly due to the general abdication of responsibility that is characteristic of certain aspects of contemporary life.

But will is one of the four Powers of the Sphinx or magical virtues, which were codified by the magical theorist Eliphas Levi in the 19th century (on the pattern, most likely, of the four traditional "natural virtues" of courage, justice, temperance, and prudence). A trained and developed will is essential to the magician -- as, in fact, it is to the mystic. But the idea of a trained and developed will almost immediately gives rise to the notion of "will power," either in the Victorian sense of clenched-jawed rigidity, or in the related idea of a towering, turgid sense of dominating power and intensity that aims at its object in order to cow it into submission.

Neither of these is particularly near the mark. The truly effective will involves no strain or turbulence: it is quiet, relaxed, and inevitable. It is usually only when the will is ineffective or impeded that its operation intrudes on awareness.

What is will, then, and how is it trained?

Will is simply a matter of what some schools of philosophy call intention, or intentionality. It is operative in every moment of consciousness, of perception, and of activity. There is a popular saying that when the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. The hammer here is any specific intent: once it is set, everything else is organized around, or by, it in a way that makes sense in terms of the framework in which it has been set. If you are a private in an army, you see your environment in terms of orders to be obeyed (or avoided); if you are a general, you see your environment in

terms of ways of exercising command. And again, if you intend to play chess, a bit of flat ground and a set of pebbles can be a chess set; if you intend to play checkers, the same objects may in that moment of intention become a checkerboard with checker pieces.

The "strength" of this sort of will comes not from any process of pumping up, but from clarity (you have to be clear about what a chess set is before you can take some set of objects as a chess set), from simplicity or unity of focus (if you can't decide whether to play chess or checkers, the patch of ground and pile of pebbles will not become either a chess or a checker set), and from unity or clarity of desire (if you would like to play chess, but know your partner would like to play checkers, and you'd like to please your partner as well, it's anyone's guess as to which the pile of pebbles will become).

Will in its highest sense is associated not so much with Geburah as with Kether, but Geburah has a special connection with the exercise of will, since Geburah is above all the sphere of discipline and correction. The root of all real power is power over oneself: self-mastery, in fact. The magical weapons of Geburah provide a strong indication of this. To wield a spear or sword with much success takes practice, and this is true with other kinds of mastery as well. Asceticism, unfashionable though it is, is not (as some see it nowadays) an indulgence in self-destruction or craven self-denial. "Ascesis" is, literally, "training" --the training of the athlete. An ascetic is someone who is in training. Ascesis is the root of power in several senses.

First, asceticism is in many times and places a source of power simply because an ascetic is charismatic. To see someone who passes up pleasures that dominate others often produces a sense of awe, even if it is only the kind of amazement that people feel when they see someone perform a difficult or dangerous act. It is also a source of power because it provides independence from distracting desires -- and that in turn gives the ascetic the time and resources to devote to mastering other skills. And again, asceticism is dedication in action. putting aside all that would prevent one from reaching the goal, and working unceasingly at all that leads there. But finally asceticism is the discipline of emptying oneself of all that is meaningless in order to embody one's vision of meaning. And this is why Geburah is linked with the imagery of the rose, which blooms on brambles, or in other symbolism on a cross, and why the sphere of Geburah is linked with the number 5, which the Pythagoreans took as the number of marriage.

## Symbolism of Geburah

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

The Divine Name: ALHIM GBUR (pronounced "El-oh-heem GehDboor");

The Archangel: Kamael, "He who sees God";

The Order of Angels: Seraphim, "Fiery Ones";

The Astrological Correspondence: Madim, the planet Mars;

The Tarot Correspondence: the four Fives of the pack.

As before, these correspondences should be committed to memory, and the first four should also be written into the four circles of Geburah on your Tree of Life diagram. Once this is done, the rest of Geburah should be colored red.

## Reading

For this lesson, your reading from The Mystical Qabalah will be Chapter XIII, "Practical Work Upon The Tree," and Chapter XIX, "Geburah, the Fifth Sphere." The first of these, despite its title, is primarily a discussion of the meaning of the different sorts of correspondences used in Qabalah, while the second explores some of the symbolism of the fifth Sephirah of the Tree.

As you read each of these chapters, compose a brief paragraph describing the main ideas covered in the chapter. Use your own words, or phrases and sentences taken from the text, as you wish. Write down these paragraphs and include them with the test for this lesson.

## Exercises

### Transmutation of the Self

As mentioned earlier in this lesson, one of the things represented by Geburah in Qabalistic thought is the human will. This aspect of human consciousness comes in for a good deal of misunderstanding in our present culture. Too often "willpower" is associated with notions of white knuckles and internal conflict, or of some mental equivalent of the bulging muscles of bodybuilders.

In fact, all of this is quite beside the point. Inner conflict and strain arise not from strength of will but from its weakness -- or, more precisely, its division. When the will is unified, when all the different aspects of the self seek the same goal in the same way, that goal can be reached without the sort of fuss and difficulty encountered by the "strong-willed."

Obviously, then, attaining this unity of will is something well worth seeking, in ordinary life as well as in esoteric matters. At the same time, such a quest has a certain circularity to it. How is one to attain the unity of will to effectively seek unity of will? This problem may seem like little more than a word game, but difficulties like this are in fact the reasons behind most of the complicated methods of the esoteric path.

The following exercise will help you begin exploring some of the issues surrounding will, and continue your training -- a training which has been going on since the beginning of this course -- in the unity of will we have been discussing. At the same time, it will introduce a simple but effective technique of practical magic, one that is particularly useful for the transmutation and balancing of undeveloped or undesired aspects of the personality. The exercise is as follows:

1. Begin by reviewing the papers from the self-perception exercise from Lesson 8. Using these as a starting point, think about yourself -- your strengths and weaknesses, the parts of yourself with which you are relatively satisfied and those that trouble you. Either in your mind or, if you find this useful, on paper, take a sort of rough inventory of yourself. This is intended to be a first approximation, not a final assessment.
2. When you have completed this, take some time to choose a part of your personality which you feel "needs work" -- either an overdeveloped aspect that you would like to diminish, or an underdeveloped one you would like to expand. Consider your choice carefully. One other point is of some importance: you should not let anyone else know just what part of your personality you've decided to work with. This last is critical, and a failure to observe this stricture will most likely make the exercise ineffective.

(It would be best not to choose an addiction you wish to get rid of as the focus of this exercise, at least for now. Most addicts have tried and failed to break the addictive cycle in the past, and this creates a habit of failure and an automatic division of will that can easily frustrate the inexperienced practitioner. The same applies, even more strongly, to issues surrounding body weight, since natural processes in the metabolism make dieting and other weight-loss methods self-

defeating, except in the short term, for most people.)

2. Think about the aspect of your personality that you've chosen in the context of the four elements and their symbolism. Does it seem to be a thing of fire, of water, of air, or of earth? It may well overlap into several elements; still, choose the one which seems most appropriate.

3. Now choose a Tarot Ace appropriate to the work you are setting out to do. If you have chosen to expand an underdeveloped part of your personality, choose the Ace assigned to that aspect's element; if you wish to diminish an overdeveloped aspect, choose the Ace of the opposite element. (For this purpose, fire and water are opposites, as are earth and air.)

4. Every morning upon rising for the next two weeks, take the Ace you have chosen out from the deck, sit in the usual position, and perform the opening gesture. Think briefly about the aspect of your personality you have chosen for this work, and then let that fade and simply focus on the card. As far as possible, keep your mind entirely on the card for the duration of the exercise, which should be at least five minutes. When you have finished, do the closing gesture and put the card away. During the two week period, make no special effort to change your thoughts or behavior, or for that matter to keep these the same as they have been.

5. At the end of the two weeks, discontinue the practice, and assess any changes that you may notice. Write a full description in your practice record.

#### Meditation

For this lesson's meditative work, we will be continuing with the method of symbolic meditation introduced in Lesson 4. For the next two weeks, therefore, your topics for work will be the four Fives of the Tarot pack. As the expression of Geburah through the four elements and Four Worlds, these have much to teach about the esoteric understanding of energy and of transformation, in the universe as well as in the self. Work with one card in each meditation session, and draw on your readings and other studies as you see fit.

As before, you'll need to come up with a single word to best express the meaning of each card as you understand it. 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, any day in which you do not do a meditation, you should do the relaxation and attention drill given in Lesson 3.

### Ritual

The Middle Pillar exercise, as given in Lesson 7, should be performed each day during the two weeks you spend on this lesson. As you work with this ritual, concentrate on being aware of any changes in feeling or energy, either in yourself or in your practice space, during and after the rite.

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

First, to perform the meditation or attention exercise every day.  
Second, to perform the daily review each day upon going to bed.  
Third, to perform the Middle Pillar exercise each day.  
Fourth, to perform the Transmutation exercise each morning on rising.  
Fifth, to continue working on the number exercise given 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 Fives of the Tarot deck.
- D. Describe some of the meanings you have found, in your continuing work with the number exercise, for one of the numbers between 4 and 10.
- 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.