

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

**Lesson 11**

The lessons of this unit have had, among other goals, the purpose of giving you some exposure to the role of self-knowledge and self-perception in the Western esoteric tradition. The work of gaining a dispassionate understanding of the self is in some sense a lifelong task, but a certain approximation of it is one of the essentials of progress along the esoteric path.

There are a number of reasons, some of which we have already mentioned, why knowledge of the self is so important in this work. One reason in particular, though, cuts to the heart of the magician's way. The self and the universe, as previous lessons have explained, mirror each other in magical thought. To understand the self, then, is to understand the universe. To learn to reshape the self, similarly, is to gain in some sense the ability to reshape the universe. And to perfect the self -- the goal of the magician's work, seen from the perspective of the microcosm, the "little universe" that is the self -- leads, in an ultimate sense, to the perfection of the universe as well.

This is the alchemical Great Work in its widest and highest form, and the final goal of all the strange words and stranger deeds, the philosophies and obfuscations and reworked superstitions of the Western esoteric path. Being the final goal, it may seem preposterously far off from the standpoint of this basic phase of the work. Still, as the old alchemical axiom has it, "the end is in the beginning." Some awareness of the purpose of this training may go a certain distance toward making sense of its odd and rather roundabout route.

One of the accusations routinely made against mystics, and not in modern Western cultures alone, is that those who take the path of inner transformation turn away from their responsibilities to the world around them -- that they dive into their own navels and vanish, so to speak, leaving their environment and their fellow human beings no better off than before. There's an extent to which this criticism has some merit, at least in some cases; our culture, again, is far from the first one in which people have sought out mysticism and magic as a refuge from their own failure to deal with life.

To some extent, also, this accusation is simply a matter of narrow perspective on the part of the accusers. Everyone, even a mystic, has an effect on others, and on the world; the most reclusive hermit lives somewhere and eats something, and the manner in which he lives and eats has its effect. This is one of the ways in which the transformation of the self helps bring about the transformation of the world; a great deal of human evil and destructiveness come out of ignorance and simple folly, and a modest amount of self-knowledge and willed change can spare other people and beings much in the way of suffering.

On the other hand, criticism of mystics as self-absorbed and selfish not uncommonly comes from those who have specific political or social agendas to push, and who become incensed that practitioners of mystical paths are slow to take these up. Certain trends in language and society have tended to make this sort of irritation a growing issue in modern times. The language of politics in our age has increasingly tended to mimic that of spirituality -- "liberation," "vision," "God-given rights," and a whole range of overtly theological concepts have intruded into the political arena on both sides of the political spectrum, with consequent losses in the ability to compromise or even to think rationally about many issues.

Despite the similarities in terminology, though, the liberation sought by mysticism and magic and that sought by politics are two very different things. The most critical difference between them is that esoteric liberation must be sought freely by the individual. Self-knowledge and self-discipline cannot be legislated into being or enforced in the courts! Much less can the insight or wisdom which is sought and gained by these tools be imposed by any political means. What can be legislated, and enforced, by political methods is public belief and public obedience -- things which have nothing to do with the esoteric path, and everything to do with political power.

The Western esoteric tradition, in turn, has a long and murky history of involvement with schemes for political change, many of them seeking the imposition of some Utopian order on the world at large. These schemes have a special fascination for some people within the tradition, who see the chaos and suffering around them and are sure that a little well-meant guidance could spare people in general a good deal of pain. At the same time, the skills taught in esoteric circles can be used in the political arena with fair success; at least one modern scholar of magical traditions has pointed out that current advertising methods are all but indistinguishable from certain kinds of traditional symbolic magic.

Such projects, however, rarely succeed; politics demands skills

beyond those practiced by magicians, a fact which few magicians who go into politics seem to be able to grasp. This is a good thing, for Utopias made concrete have an unpleasant habit of going sour -- or septic. Imperfect beings and a "perfect" society make for a disastrous mix.

In this context, the tradition of withdrawal from political life practiced by many mystics and magicians makes a good deal of sense, and has been codified into a strict rule in some modern magical orders. You may find it useful to think about this rule, and to explore your own perceptions concerning the differences between political and esoteric ways of dealing with the ideas of transformation and freedom.

### **Reading**

The assigned reading from *The Mystical Qabalah* for this lesson will be Chapter XXI, "The Four Lower Sephiroth," and Chapter XXVI, "The Oliphoth." The first of these provides a framework for understanding the four spheres of the Tree closest to ordinary consciousness, and offers one perspective -- far from the only one, but a useful one in certain contexts -- on the many gods and goddesses of human religious devotion. The second discusses the problem of evil from a Qabalistic perspective.

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

### **Exercises**

\_\_\_\_\_ Tarot:

\_\_\_\_\_ The Trumps

This exercise can be done in a single sitting, or broken up into two sections, as you prefer. Allow about 90 minutes for the entire exercise, or about 45 minutes for each of the two sections if done separately. You only need to do this exercise once, but you may do it as many as four times before you begin the next lesson.

A. Lay out the Trumps in the pattern given below. Study each vertical pair, beginning with 0-XI. The image and title of each Trump will mean something to you, whether you have any exposure to the esoteric traditions behind them or not. What do these paired images and names express to you as a pair? As two

separate cards interacting? What light does each card in a pair cast on the other? Take notes on what you've observed.

0	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI

Next, reverse the order of the second row of cards, so that the numerical order runs right to left. Repeat the study process as above, starting with 0-XXI. Take notes as before.

Finally, compare the implications of the two different pairings for each of the Trumps. This step doesn't need to take much time or effort; simply compare the notes you've made. Make any additional notes you need to make.

B. Lay out the Trumps in a circle, beginning with the Fool, reversed, about 3 to 5 card-lengths in front of you. Place Justice, upright, in front of you, directly beneath the Fool. Fill the space between with the other Trumps in numerical order, continuing around the circle clockwise (see Diagram 1, at the end of this lesson). Each card should face outward from the center of the circle.

Get up and walk around the circle. Look at the flow of images from one card to another. Walk around the circle again, but this time, as you pass each card, scan the circle to find the two cards it was paired with in the first part of the exercise. Look at the interactions between the cards, and where the cards are located in the circle. Write up your observations in your magical record.

### Meditation

This lesson's meditative work will follow the slightly different approach we introduced back in Lesson 7. Instead of working with the symbols of one of the Sephiroth in your meditations, you will be exploring the meanings and implications of a brief text. The framework of the meditation -- that is, the sequence of opening, relaxation, rhythmic breathing, and so on -- will remain the same; only the focus of consciousness changes.

In keeping with the focus of this lesson, the text you will be using here consists of three questions:

Where have I come from?

Where am I going?

What am I?

In your meditations, try to answer these as completely and accurately as possible. Take one of them at a time, and devote at least four sessions of meditation to each. In one or more sessions, you may find that nothing in the way of an answer presents itself at all; if this happens, keep trying, and keep your thoughts focused on the question no matter how difficult, boring, or annoying this becomes.

As before, ten minutes of actual meditation in each session will be sufficient. During the two weeks you spend on this lesson, do the attention exercise on any day in which you do not do a meditation.

### Ritual

At this point, you have been practicing the form of the Middle Pillar exercise presented in Lesson 7 for close to two months. That form, as we mentioned then, is the first and most basic phase of an exercise which is capable of much in the way of development. With this lesson, you will be moving on to the second phase, and a more focused and specialized development of the energy centers of your subtle body.

This second phase is performed as follows:

1. Perform the complete Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, as before.

2. Standing in the center of the banished space, facing East, formulate the Middle Pillar in the same manner as you have been doing, one sphere at a time, vibrating the appropriate Divine Name for each. Two changes, however, are to be made:

A. The spheres are visualized in colored rather than pure white light. The sphere above the crown of the head remains white, but the one at the throat is light gray, that at the solar plexus is golden, that at the genitals is violet, and that beneath the feet is intense black with a slight greenish tinge.

B. The time spent holding the visualization of each sphere should be increased. Between the first inbreath, when the sphere is built up, and the vibration of the Name, set some number of slow even breaths -- four might be a suitable choice -- and do this at each of the spheres while holding the image in your mind as clearly and forcefully as you can.

3. Once the entire Middle Pillar has been established and visualized as a unity, as in the first version of the exercise,

turn your attention again to the point of light far above your head. Breathing in, visualize a beam of white light streaming down from that distant point into the highest of the spheres, and flowing down through each of the spheres in turn until it reaches the sphere beneath your feet, where it stops. Breathing out, visualize the five spheres radiating this new flow of energy outward, into your physical body and into a roughly egg-shaped region extending a few feet out from your body in all directions. Repeat this whole process four times.

4. Now direct your attention down below your feet, all the way down to a point at the center of the earth. Breathing in, visualize a beam of rich green light streaming up from that point to the sphere beneath your feet, and flowing up through each of the spheres in turn until it reaches the sphere above your head, where it stops. Breathing out, visualize the five spheres radiating this energy outward into your physical and etheric bodies as before. Repeat this whole process four times.

5. Now turn your attention to the sphere you have formulated at your solar plexus. Breathing in, draw the air you breathe down to the solar plexus center, and visualize that center shining with an ever more intense golden light. Breathing out, try to see and feel that light streaming outward in all directions, through your body and the egg-shaped area surrounding it. Repeat this whole process four times.

6. Finally, perform the Qabalistic Cross once more to complete the exercise.

This phase of the Middle Pillar exercise, like the last one, should be performed every day, preferably at the same time of day. Please review the instructions in Lesson 7, as well as these, to be sure of your grasp of the details.

To summarize, then, the work of 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 perform the Tarot exercise.

Fifth, to continue working with 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.

Diagram 1

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## 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 an account of one session of this lesson's meditative work.

B. Copy out from your magical record an account of one performance of the expanded Middle Pillar exercise.

C. Describe, using the account in your magical record as a basis, what you learned from the Tarot exercise.

D. Drawing on your work with the number exercise, describe some of the meanings you have found 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.