

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

Lesson 12

The work of this course has involved, in a certain sense, a passage down the Tree of Life -- not merely in terms of the symbols and reading covered, but in certain elements of underlying structure as well. Ideas which emerged in the first unit of the course, and were stated in their simplest form in the second, have returned at greater and greater levels of complexity in the following lessons.

With this unit, both the symbolic and the structural passages down the Tree come within reach of the realm of ordinary experience. The Sephiroth to be studied in these four lessons -- Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malkuth, the quaternary that forms the lowest section of the Tree of Life -- form the world in which everyday life takes place, and their equivalents in the microcosm of human consciousness -- the emotions, the intellect, the range of subtle perceptions often called "intuition," and the five physical senses, respectively -- provide most of the tools with which human beings make their way through that world.

It may not be immediately obvious why this should be so. It may be less obvious still why the human functions that correspond to the higher Sephiroth do not play an equal role.

A careful examination of what actually goes on in your awareness, though, will reveal an interesting point. The higher functions, whether those of the upper levels of the ruach (memory, will, imagination) or those of the neshamah, chiah or yechidah, usually appear -- when they appear at all -- in the guise of one of the lower four functions. Memory may take the form of a sensory image, will of an emotional drive, creative imagination of an idea or an intuitive sense of "rightness"; any of the higher aspects may take the form of any of the lower ones, but they rarely if ever appear in their own guise.

That the higher functions have their own forms, distinct from the appearances mentioned here, is a matter not only of Qabalistic theory but of personal experience for many people. The memory that reaches out beyond a single image or idea to grasp the essence of some past time; the burst of will that

overrides all inner and outer obstacles; the imagination that draws together a myriad fragments of experience in an instant to make a single meaningful unity -- these are things that happen to many human beings now and again.

It is this "now and again," of course, that is the sticking point. These experiences are rarely common, and even more rarely repeatable at will. They represent occasional flickers of a level of functioning that, most of the time, is out of reach. It's worth noting, too, that their equivalents in the lower functions -- ordinary memory, will, and so on -- are notoriously unreliable.

One useful model for this feature of human experience is the image of a barrier, definite but permeable, separating the four lower from the six higher Sephiroth. In the Qabalah, this barrier is called the Veil of the Sanctuary. There is a great deal of theoretical material in Qabalistic writings concerning the origins, nature, and purpose of this Veil, but at this point these are less significant than the fact of the Veil itself -- and of the possibility of its opening.

For the Veil can be parted, deliberately, in a transformation of awareness carried out by way of the technical processes of meditation and magic. This is one way of describing the primary work of the magician in the Western esoteric tradition.

The parting of the Veil has as its first object the attainment of the phase of consciousness symbolized by Tiphareth. This is not only the closest of the higher Sephiroth to the Veil, but the natural center of the ruach, the conscious self, as well. In this sense the opening of the Veil of the Sanctuary can also be seen as an act of recentering, in which consciousness enters into a place of balance and the rest of the self comes into proper alignment around it.

This recentering is a radical transformation, with radical effects. It does not, on the other hand, bring about perfection. Nor is it the end of the process of transmutation. Quite the contrary: the purpose of this primary work is to open up possibilities, not close them off for good.

Netzach: Emotion

Netzach is the sphere of the myriad energies which are experienced, in ordinary consciousness, as moods. One of the features of moods, and of the energies of Netzach generally, is that they manifest not so much in the form of objects of awareness as in that of alterations of awareness. When one is

angry, one does not see anger -- one sees the object or target of one's anger through the anger, and colored by it. The same is true of other moods and emotions. In fact, all the Sephiroth of the side of Mercy have to do more with the qualities of consciousness than the objects of consciousness.

Since the energies of the sphere of Netzach manifest as alterations in the act of knowing or perceiving, rather than in the object of perception, it is generally much easier to identify with them -- that is, to take one's own feelings too personally. Feeling anger, it is easy to conclude "I am angry." The problem with this conclusion is that it can go beyond a mere descriptive statement: it can become a policy statement, or a basic plank in the platform of one's sense of who one is. This, in turn, means that one comes to see moods as "all in one's head," a function of one's own nature -- thus devaluing them. From an esoteric point of view, moods are the manifestation of energies, and can transcend the merely personal in the same way that the abstract structures of mathematics transcend the minds which perceive them.

What Yeats called "the fire-born moods" are manifestations in us of impersonal energies that are in play all around us, and throughout our world. A significant part of magical training has to do with learning to sense these energies and to recognize their autonomous functioning in the world. Yet another part has to do with intentional control of these energies by evocation and invocation. To be able to invoke the moods of the cosmos, however, without being swept away by them, one must first be able to experience the moods of ordinary life without being dominated by them. Thus another aspect of magical work involves strengthening one's ability to work with energies by working with moods and establishing channels through which they can flow without risk of damage.

The four functions of awareness mapped out in Jungian psychology -- feeling, intellect, intuition and sensation -- can be aligned with the four traditional elements and the humors, and one can learn a great deal from considering the correspondences between these different schemes. One very important point, however, is often insufficiently appreciated. There are two ways in which each of these functions of the psyche can manifest: as superior (integrated) or inferior (unintegrated). A person who is subject to strong, dominating moods is not necessarily a "feeling" type; instead, such a person may have a poorly integrated feeling function. Similarly, a person whose thoughts are dominated with some set of ideas may well have a poorly integrated intellectual function. An integrated function is available for use, and is under conscious control. An unintegrated, undeveloped function acts autonomously, and

intrusively.

In magical work, then, it is necessary for those who would invoke the energies of the world to ensure that their own energies are integrated and in equilibrium. Failure to do so may lead to disruption, or domination by uncontrollable moods.

Symbolism of Netzach

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

The Divine Name: YHVH TzBAVTh (pronounced Ye-ho-wah Tza-ba-oth);

The Archangel: Haniel, "Grace of God";

The Order of Angels: Tarshishim, "Shining Ones";

The Astrological Correspondence: Nogah, the planet Venus;

The Tarot Correspondence: the four Sevens 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 Netzach on your Tree of Life diagram. Once this is done, the rest of Netzach should be colored green.

Reading

For this lesson, your reading from The Mystical Qabalah will be Chapter XXII, "Netzach". This chapter contains, along with material on the traditional symbolism of the seventh Sephirah, a discussion of one of the esoteric approaches to love and sexuality.

As you read, 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 this paragraph and include it with the test for this lesson.

In addition, please review Chapter XVI, "Chokmah, the Second Sephirah," and Chapter XVIII, "Chesed, the Fourth Sephirah." This material, along with that on Netzach, offers a framework for understanding the symbolism and meaning of the Pillar of Mercy. What connections do you see between these Spheres?

Exercises

Self-Perception Exercise: Emotions

The four lowest Sephiroth of the Tree of Life, as you've learned, are associated with four common functions of ordinary human awareness: Netzach with the emotions, Hod with the intellect, Yesod with the ill-defined set of perceptions usually lumped together as "intuition," and Malkuth with the ordinary physical senses. Under normal conditions, these four functions make up most of what goes on in the human mind. The exercises of the Western esoteric tradition do not count as "normal conditions," of course, and one of the results of working with these exercises is the emergence of other functions within the awareness. All the same, these four common functions remain, and need to be explored and understood.

The following exercise is intended to help you carry out some part of this work of exploration. In a certain sense, it is a follow-on to the self-perception exercise introduced in Lesson 8. It involves, however, a more specific focus and a different approach.

For the next two weeks, then, your task is to become aware of your emotional state and its transformations as you can. Try to do this not for specified periods, but generally, throughout your ordinary activities. When you do your daily review at the end of each day, you should be able to recall not only what you did but how you felt, what your mood was. As you go about your daily affairs, pay attention to your emotional reactions to events, as well as to those feelings which may not seem to have any connection to what happens.

In this exercise, what is needed is not the intense focus of, for instance, meditation, but rather a background awareness that will not interfere with your ordinary activities. This kind of background awareness is itself a magical technique of some importance, and worth developing; some students find it comes easily, others have more trouble acquiring the knack. Work on it for the next two weeks, and keep notes on the results in your magical record.

Tarot: Storytelling

For many people, the Tarot deck is first and foremost a method of divination -- that is, a means of obtaining information which is not otherwise available to consciousness, whether that information be about "the future" -- a concept which itself begs a great many questions -- or about hidden aspects of a present situation. While the Tarot has many more uses in the Western esoteric tradition, its divinatory function is an important one,

and a valuable tool for the magician in training.

Divination, though, is a more complex art than it may seem at first glance. To divine with the Tarot is not simply a matter of dealing out a handful of cards and looking up predetermined meanings. (In fact, it's at least in part as a result of this sort of unintelligent approach to divination that the diviner's art is so little respected in our society at present.)

One of the more useful approaches to understanding divination is to treat it as a subset of the broader human art of storytelling. People have always told each other stories as a means of making sense of the world; the mythic tales that are the oldest of stories are also the deepest, in terms of their power to give shape and meaning to human experience. In reading a spread of Tarot cards, the diviner tells a story, taking some cards as characters, others as events, still others as underlying forces which drive the story onward to its end.

The following exercise is intended to give you some experience of this process, and to serve as a stepping-stone to the practice of Tarot divination introduced later in this unit. It should be done at least four times during the two weeks you spend on this lesson; allow at least half an hour for each session.

1. Sit at (or on) a convenient flat surface, such as a table, a bed, or the floor. Your Tarot deck should be within reach. Begin with the usual opening gesture, and then take out the deck and shuffle it at least three times.
2. Deal out anything between three and ten cards from the top of the deck, one at a time, turning them over as you deal them. Set them down before you side by side in a line.
3. Now consider the cards before you. Think of them as a sequence of images running from left to right -- as though they were writing in a picture alphabet, or panels in a comic strip from which the words somehow were left out. If there are court cards present, try thinking of them as people involved in this collection of images; Trumps with human figures might be treated in the same way, while those with other images -- the Tower, for instance -- may be seen as situations or settings. If number cards appear, use your keywords or the images on the cards as seems best to you.
4. Finally, make up a story out of the images before you. This does not have to be a long story, or a very detailed one -- a spread of three or four cards isn't likely to give material for more than a single incident -- but it should include all of the

cards in one way or another, and follow the progression of the cards from left to right. A few sentences' worth is enough for the purpose of this exercise. Write these sentences down, and close with the usual gesture.

This process may seem like child's play, and in an important sense it is; most children, unlike most adults, retain a quality of unself-conscious imagination which is one of the most useful elements of the diviner's art. If this exercise is approached in a playful manner it is likely to prove more rewarding than if it is attempted in grim seriousness.

Meditation

For this lesson's meditative work, you will be continuing with the system of meditation on symbols first introduced back in Lesson 4. For the next two weeks, therefore, the topics for your meditation will be the four Sevens of the Tarot pack. As before, you'll need to come up with a single word describing 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.

This meditation should be done each day during the two weeks you spend on this lesson. As always, a full description of your meditations should be entered in your magical record.

Ritual

The expanded Middle Pillar exercise, as given in Lesson 11, should be performed each day during the two weeks you spend on this lesson. During these workings, pay particular attention to any emotional effects you may notice from the ritual. Does it have any effect on your mood? If so, is the effect consistent, or does it seem to vary from day to day? Keep notes on this in your magical record.

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

First, to perform the meditation each day.
Second, to perform the Middle Pillar exercise each day.
Third, to perform the daily review each day upon going to bed.
Fourth, to carry out the self-perception exercise as given above.
Fifth, to do the Tarot storytelling exercise four times during the time you spend on this 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 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 four Sevens of the Tarot deck.
- D. Briefly describe your experiences with the self-perception exercise from this lesson.
- E. Copy out your account of one performance of the Tarot storytelling exercise.
- F. 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.