

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

Lesson 18

This lesson concludes the Companions of the Stone correspondence course for associate members. In it, we have two major goals: to finish our discussion of certain themes which have appeared earlier in this course, and to provide some grounding in what is ahead for those who wish to seek the next stage of involvement in the work of the Companions of the Stone.

Ultimately, these two goals are one and the same, because the further levels of magical study and practice are simply ways of pursuing the same ends we've discussed already, with the aid of progressively subtler and more powerful techniques and energies.

The most important difference between the material we've covered in this course and the work taught at further levels has already been discussed: the inclusion of group workings, in which the efforts of a number of trained magicians can be directed toward a single end. Here as elsewhere, from the perspective of the Western esoteric tradition, the most important such end is the process of personal transformation; the generic term for workings that have this purpose is initiation.

Initiation

There has probably been more nonsense written about the topic of initiation than about anything else in the Western esoteric tradition (with the possible exception of the so-called lost continent of Atlantis!). Much of this nonsense presents initiation as a veiled, mysterious thing, presided over by vast powers and Secret Chiefs and granting powers that belong inside a comic book. On the other hand, there is a substantial amount of nonsense dedicated to the opposite view -- that every initiation is a farce, a hoax, or a fraud, a mummery designed to conceal the fact that any real inner development is a matter of personal work and that alone.

As usual, the balanced view lies somewhere between the extremes. An initiation, in the terms used by the Western esoteric tradition, is a ritual working designed to do certain specific things:

1. It forms a link between the awareness of the initiate and a transpersonal energy -- either the collective energy of a group, or the energy of a deity or spiritual principle which is invoked and brought into focus by the initiators;
2. It establishes certain symbols in the awareness of the initiate, which serve as "handles" for the energy link;
3. It provides the initiate with a set of methods for using these "handles" in individual work, so that energy brought through the link can be brought to bear in specific ways on the task of personal transformation.

One effect of initiation is thus an increase in the amount of force available for individual work. This point is critical: initiation does not replace solitary work; rather, it requires solitary work in order for its potential to be brought out. The same is true of any form of group working, from the simplest to the most complex and powerful. The work of the further levels of the Companions of the Stone thus involves daily practices of the sort you've experienced in this course, but focused in part on the development of the potentials inherent in the group work of the Order.

How does initiation function in practical terms? It would be inappropriate to give too many details of the initiations used by the Companions of the Stone, for the simple reason that a certain level of surprise plays an important role in any initiation's psychological effect. Still, a general outline can be given, one that is true for most of the initiatory rites practiced by traditional Western magical groups.

In general terms, then, the candidate for initiation is placed in a heightened state of awareness by certain simple and non-invasive means, and brought into a specially prepared space. In this space the candidate takes an obligation, binding himself or herself to follow certain rules of conduct as a member of the group, and then moves through a set of experiences in which the symbols of the initiation are presented in dramatic form. The candidate then receives the keys that allow access to certain aspects of the initiation's energies, and is formally welcomed into the group as an initiate. Throughout the process, the candidate's own awareness interacts at several levels with that of the group, as well as with the invoked energies of the initiation. These interactions energize the symbols and keys presented, making them usable by the initiate in personal and group work alike.

It's important to note that at no time in a magical initiation

is the initiate hurt or humiliated, nor is any form of force or coercion used. Such things are useless for the purposes of the initiatory work, and do not belong in a magical lodge in any form whatever.

The actual effects of an initiation are often subtle, and may not be apparent until after a certain amount of time and further work. It sometimes happens that a candidate who has reached a crisis point in his or her own inner progress may find that an initiatory ritual will catalyze dramatic changes; still, this is fairly rare. More often the real results can be seen clearly only in hindsight.

Still, these results are definite, and make the initiatory process one of the central parts of most traditionally oriented magical groups in the Western world. Even the watered-down version of the process practiced by fraternal groups such as the Freemasons and Odd Fellows have kept enough effectiveness to give these groups a surprising longevity and influence.

Entering A Magical Order

The process of initiation also has another function in most traditional Western magical groups, the Companions of the Stone among them. It is by way of a ceremony of initiation that new members are brought into the group.

This is more than a mere formality. Every group, from a magical Order to a sewing circle, has its own personality and energy; both of these develop out of the personalities and energies of the individuals who make up the group, but both quickly take on characteristics of their own. In a group that has been together for some time, these collective functions help keep the group moving in the direction of its goals, and also produce the almost physical sense of boundary which separates group members from "outsiders."

In the Western esoteric tradition, this aspect of a group is called an egregor. Many aspects of group work deal explicitly with the energy and personality of the group egregor, making conscious use of what (outside the magical tradition) is usually an unconscious phenomenon. In a well-run magical Order, the group egregor is a major tool of esoteric work, flexible enough to accommodate new members easily but strong enough to keep the Order oriented in the direction of its ideals.

In most traditional magical Orders -- and, here again, the Companions of the Stone is among these -- the link established in the lower grades of initiation is specifically a link with

the egregor of the Order. Initiates can thus draw on the collective energies of the Order in their individual work, and also assist with the renewal and transmission of those energies in group rituals.

A link of this sort carries with it certain consequences. It entails responsibilities on the part of each member to the group, and on the part of the group to each member. Those responsibilities are formalized in the obligation taken during the initiation ceremony, but their essence is simple good faith: a willingness to keep agreements once made, to deal honestly with other group members, to respect the formal structures of the group, and to work together with others toward the achievement of the group's goals.

It's important to recognize, though, that the link is not necessarily permanent. Formed through ritual, it can be broken through ritual as well, and in cases when the obligations of membership have been broken by a member it can be severed by the Order. It can also be severed by the individual member, if such a one chooses to leave the Order permanently or feels that the responsibilities of his or her obligation are more than he or she wishes to meet.

You took your first obligation in the Companions of the Stone at the beginning of your associate membership, when you agreed in writing not to pass on these lessons to any person outside the Order. At that time, you also entered in a small way into a link with the Order. If you choose to apply for membership as an Initiate Companion, and are accepted, these will be replaced by a broader obligation and a more significant link. In keeping with the principle of good faith, however, you will be shown and asked to sign a copy of the complete First Degree obligation before you receive initiation, and you will also have an opportunity to ask questions about the Order during the admission process.

Exercises

Course Review

The last two lessons have given you two different exercises in looking back over the work you've done with this course. Your reactions to the lessons will have taught you certain things; your reactions to your own magical record will have taught you others.

Your task now is to synthesize these, along with your memories, your opinions, your original hopes and expectations, and your current outlook on the course and its subject, into a general response to the nine months' study and practice you're now finishing.

For a student of this work, the value of such a response is significant. As teachers of magic, it's our experience that people come to a course of this kind with a wide range of expectations and an even wider range of motives. In many cases, those expectations and motives may not have been clearly understood, or even conscious. In considering the course, in comparing what you wanted from it with what you got (or didn't get), you may find your own approach to the subject becoming a little more clear. This not only represents a gain in self-knowledge, it also offers the hope that your future esoteric studies -- with the Companions of the Stone, or elsewhere -- will follow more closely along your own personal talents and needs.

Over the next two weeks, review your experiences in this course, and come to an assessment of the time you've spent with it. Try to distill this down to a paragraph or two, and be ready to include this on your test for this lesson.

Meditation

The last two lessons have also given you a set of meditation exercises working on the interface between ritual and meditative modes of magic. With this final lesson, that interface will be brought to completion. As we've mentioned elsewhere, the practice given here opens up onto almost unlimited possibilities for further magical work, possibilities which can be pursued either with or apart from our Order.

Your meditations for the next two weeks will, except for one change, be identical to the ones given in Lesson 17. The one change is that, at this point, you will be acting in physical and visualized bodies at the same time.

Begin the practice as before, with the gesture of opening and a banishing ritual, followed by the normal opening for meditation. Project the sphere of golden light from your solar plexus, followed by the lodge room; visualize this in as much clarity and solidity as you can manage.

When you rise from your chair to begin the active phase of the work, though, do so physically at the same time as you visualize the action. Unless you have a large practice space, you'll need to treat the chair as the altar on the physical level; move your

physical body around to the back of the chair, to the position in which you did your initial banishing, while you visualize yourself advancing to the altar. (You should not let your visualized and physical bodies separate in space during this process; the trick to doing this is to allow the visualized room to "slide" relative to the physical one, so that the visualized chair in which you were sitting ends up as far behind your position as the altar was originally in front.)

At this point, moving in physical and visualized space at the same time, perform the invoking ritual, speaking and vibrating aloud. You will have to open your eyes at intervals in order to move safely (if, in fact, you usually visualize with closed eyes -- not everyone does), but try to retain the visualized lodge around you even when your eyes are open.

Once this is completed, for the first week you spend on this lesson, perform the complete Middle Pillar exercise in the joined physical and visualized bodies, and then banish in both bodies, return to the chair, and close as before.

For the second week, you will need to provide yourself with a goblet or chalice half full of water -- a wine glass will do. If you have a large practice space, this should be placed on a small table, upended box, or other altar substitute; this will serve as the physical representation of the visualized altar. If space is cramped, set the goblet under the chair where you will be sitting. (Be careful not to kick it over accidentally!) When you rise from the chair, take a moment to place it in a stable position on the seat before you go behind the chair.

Proceed as before, in both bodies, and at the end of the invoking ritual call down the light as you did in the meditation from last lesson's work. Raise your arms and head physically as well as in visualization, and build the image of the descending light as clearly and strongly as possible, making sure that the visualized goblet and the real one occupy the same space and receive the same visualized light during this process. Then lift both goblets together, and drink.

Finish by banishing and returning to the chair -- be careful not to sit on the physical goblet -- and close in the same form as before.

Once again, always be sure to withdraw the visualized lodge room and the sphere of light back into your body at the end of the practice.

It's possible that this practice may set off certain energy body reactions which, although not harmful, can be somewhat unnerving

to deal with. If, after you finish one of these meditations, you find yourself experiencing any of these symptoms --

- dizziness, light-headedness, or vertigo
- a "floating" feeling
- flashes of intense, unexpected imagery
- difficulty concentrating or thinking

-- eat a large meal as soon as possible. Food in the stomach will ground you and help your energies return to a more balanced state. If possible, you should let at least six hours pass before doing any other magical work, and you should avoid alcohol or other mind-alterants during that time. These reactions are an occasional side effect of magical work at an unfamiliar level of intensity, and will go away as experience is gained.

Tarot Divination

Your Tarot work during the next two weeks will be the daily Tarot divination introduced in Lesson 15. At this point, with six weeks of practice behind you, you may be starting to be able to read the cards well enough to anticipate the way a reading will work out in terms of the day's events. Where it seems appropriate, consider adjusting your choices in accordance with the cards' advice; keep track of the results in your practice journal.

Ritual

Your ritual work for the next two weeks will be the expanded version of the Middle Pillar exercise, as given in Lesson 11. It's important that you continue to do this in the ordinary manner, even when you are also doing the first half of this month's meditative work; you'll find that the two practices have different effects, and draw on different levels of yourself. Pay close attention to this difference, and to the effects that each practice seems to have on the other.

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.

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 on the second.

B. Copy out an account of one working of the Middle Pillar exercise you did as part of this lesson's work. Did the meditation seem to have any effect on this practice? If so, what?

C. Copy out an account of one of your daily meditations from the two weeks you spent on this lesson, along with your interpretation and comments.

D. Describe your general response to this course, as discussed in this lesson's 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.

When this test is received by the Tutorial Committee, you will be sent a copy of the comprehensive examination for this course, along with an application form for regular membership as an Initiate Companion of the Stone. The examination must be completed and returned before the application can be processed.