

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

**Lesson 2**

At this point in your training, you will have had two weeks of experience with the most basic level of practices we offer, and the same amount of time to note the way you respond to the discipline of regular practice. This discipline, and the self-knowledge and self-awareness that can be gained through it, have an important place in any system of esoteric work. Just as it's impossible to master a musical instrument without developing the habit of regular practice, so the infinitely more subtle instrument of human awareness can be mastered only through persistent effort.

At the beginning of this lesson's work, then, take some time to review your practice journal and assess the work you've done so far. Read through Lesson 1 again, and compare the way you did the exercises with the way they were presented. Try to gain some sort of sense of the way in which you've been approaching the course. This should not be an exercise in passing judgements or in self-criticism (or, for that matter, self-praise); simply review, assess, and determine if any changes in the way you handle the work are appropriate. This process -- a sort of mid-course correction, so to speak -- should be done after each of the lessons of this course.

People differ; so, too, do their reactions to the experience of taking up regular esoteric work. One pattern of reactions is relatively common, though, and worth discussing here. You may already have experienced something like it yourself.

In this pattern, the beginning stages of practical work seem interesting, even exciting; enthusiasm is easily come by and commitments, sometimes extreme ones, easy to make. The work goes well, often surprisingly so. After a certain time, though, the first rush of enthusiasm fades. Initial successes give way to frustration, fatigue, boredom. The commitments made so eagerly a short time before start to feel like annoyances, then hindrances, then intolerable burdens. Practices are postponed or forgotten, readings skimmed or neglected, and fairly often the whole process of practical work comes to a halt. Far too often, the pattern ends with the student, once so enthusiastic,

dropping out entirely and either taking up something different or abandoning the idea of esoteric training altogether.

This pattern has many phases and many disguises, but a single source, and the name of that source is fear. The mind and the personality often fear and resist change, particularly when that change puts at risk the carefully balanced fabric of compromises, inattentions and little lies that we all so often use to cover over the unacceptable aspects of our world and ourselves. By teaching the conscious use of the powers of human awareness, esoteric training opens up possibilities of growth and healing, but it also opens up self-knowledge -- and this is by no means always a comfortable experience.

In many magical writings, this fear is symbolized by the somewhat florid image of the Watcher at the Threshold, a monstrous shadow-presence which must be overcome in order to pass the threshold of esoteric training. Aside from the real value of a name and a symbolism for this common experience, the image and lore of the Watcher has something of use to offer the student of esoteric tradition; like all legendary monsters, the Watcher has a chink in its armor, a secret vulnerability. If it is faced with simple persistence, it submits.

If you find yourself going through some form of the pattern described above, then -- or, for that matter, if you are already in the middle of it -- the one way out is to continue with the practices. Sometimes all that is necessary is a single effort of will, a decision to keep going despite the pressures to give up. Sometimes, a more extended effort is needed. Either way, the experience is itself a part of the process of training, and an important step toward the higher reaches of esoteric work.

### **Levels of Being**

One of the central concepts of the Western esoteric tradition, and one of the major differences between that tradition and current materialist ideologies, is the idea that the universe exists, and can best be understood as existing, on many levels of being. The universe of matter and physical energy, which moderns tend to see (whether they realize it or not) as the only reality, is from this perspective only one of several realms of existence. The relationship between these realms can be likened to that between the colors of the spectrum, or the different frequencies of radio waves, forming a continuum between spirit and matter or, to use another way of expressing the same thing, between pure potentiality and complete manifestation.

This continuum of being can be illustrated by using two

interpenetrating triangles, as shown in the diagram on the next page. The un-shaded triangle represents spirit, potentiality, or form (understood as different ways of talking about the same thing), while the shaded triangle represents matter, manifestation or substance. Whatever the terminology used, it is important to keep in mind that these two triangles are not different things, but distinguishable states or modes of the same thing -- the "One Thing" spoken of in alchemical texts, of which all other things are adaptations.

It is convenient for practical purposes to divide this continuum of being into several levels. The Four Worlds and ten Sephiroth of Qabalistic theory can be used in this way; the tradition contains several others as well. One very useful division involves marking out five levels of existence, corresponding to five realms of human experience and thus to five realms of magical work, as well as to five natural divisions of the diagram above. These are described in Table 1.

**Table I:  
Levels of Being**

PHYSICAL (E) The material world as perceived through the five ordinary senses. In Hermetic theory, the furthest outward extent of the process of Creation, consisting of entirely passive and formless substance, without life or form unless affected by the higher levels. Qabalistically, it can be aligned with Malkuth, especially the farthest, limiting aspects of Malkuth. Among the Elements, it aligns with Earth.

ETHERIC (D) The subtle structuring energies that lie immediately behind the world of matter, corresponding to what students of Yoga know as prana, and students of martial arts know as ki or ch'i. Often apparently perceived through the ordinary senses, though actually perceived through their etheric counterparts; many aspects of the body that seem at first to be properties of the physical body can better be ascribed to this energy body. Qabalistically, the etheric level can be aligned with Yesod primarily, as well as with aspects of Malkuth. Among the Elements, it aligns with Water.

ASTRAL (C) The realm of concrete consciousness, perceived by the imagination (and, less directly, by other aspects of the mind). Most often the level of ordinary human thought, and also the level of most magical workings. In the Hermetic tradition, the transmission fluid, so to speak, between matter and spirit. Qabalistically, it aligns with Tiphareth primarily, and with the Sephiroth from Hod to Chesed more generally; in one sense, due to the importance of images in astral perception, the astral realm aligns with Yesod, the "treasure House of Images", as well. Among the Elements, it aligns with Fire.

MENTAL (B) The realm of abstract consciousness, containing the basic patterns or "forms" upon which Creation is founded, perceived by the intuition and by the highest aspects of thought. A characteristic feature of this realm is its impersonality or trans-personality; thus it can be associated Qabalistically with Daath, the quasi-Sephirah astride the Abyss, which is in one of its senses the conjunction of Chokmah and Binah. Among the Elements, it aligns with Air.

SPIRITUAL (A) The realm of pure creative power emanating from the Divine, beyond all definition or limitation. The highest mode of experience accessible to human beings, perceived only in the inmost core of the Self. Qabalistically Kether, though Chokmah and Binah are echoes of it, and it does not stop with Kether but extends indefinitely beyond. Among the Elements, it aligns with Spirit.

This system will be used extensively in the following lessons, but it should not be taken as anything more than a convenient classification. Its one real advantage is that it provides a common language with which we can talk about, and point out, things that are otherwise hard to express. Please familiarize yourself with the terms and the way they are used here, and think about the ways that your own experience fits into these categories.

The continuum of realms can be divided in other ways. For

example, it can also be seen as ranging not between form and substance, but between energy and form, each level being a reflection or inversion of the one before it.. If level A, then, is pure energy, B is that energy coalescing into forms; C represents the energies of those forms. This means that D, the etheric aspect of things, is actually a mode of form, and that E, the material world, is actually a mode of energy. This fits very well with the Neoplatonic idea that matter is, at root, an idea of limit, of refusal, that its energy is an energy of negation or resistance to the organizing forms. During this course, however, we will focus on the first scheme.

Another system of classification you will be using extensively is based on the traditional concept of the magical elements. Many people have heard something to the effect that people once believed there were four elements, earth, air, fire, and water. This information is often associated with a certain amount of mockery but, like the mockery associated with the claim that people once believed that the Earth was flat (and that by going too far on could drop off the edge), the mockery says more about the limited knowledge of those who indulge in it than it does about what people actually once believed.

The four "elements" were not understood in the sense of the elements of modern chemistry and physics. They were not, in fact, originally a set of four, nor did they remain so. Among the early Greek philosophers, various substances were put forward at times emblems of the basic substance of which everything was made. One philosopher proposed that water was the best emblem for the basic substance or existence; another philosopher proposed fire for the same role; other philosophers felt that the qualities of the world could not be reduced to any one basic quality, and so looked to some set of essential, irreducible qualities as the basic substrates which, in combination, could represent the fundamental root matter of the world.

The final model, which lasted for almost two thousand years in one form or another, is associated with Aristotle. It involves the four familiar elements, Earth, Water, Fire and Air, and a fifth, known as the "Quintessence" (from the Latin for "fifth element"), or simply as Spirit. This is a scheme that we will be using in this course.

The five elements have a special relationship with the Hermetic art of alchemy, because they are not static, unchanging counters: they are phases of transformation, and the rules that govern their transformations are important in alchemical work. Each element can be seen as the resultant or product of two qualities. Thus, Fire is Hot and Dry, while Water is Cold and

Wet. They are clearly opposites, and can be arranged as in the diagram on the top of the next page, where Fire is at the top and Water at the bottom. It is clear, then, that the two other elements are the products of Cold and Dry (at the left), and Hot and Wet (at the right) -- and these qualities are traditionally ascribed to Earth and Air, respectively. The Quintessence is in the middle: it is the common substrate of all the elements. It is what remains constant as the elements change one into another through changes in the balance of qualities.

The elements can also be arranged in a circle, as in the next diagram. When the Quintessence is put at the center of the circle, there are many (in fact 24) ways of arranging the remaining four at the quarters of a circle. The arrangement in this diagram links the elements with the seasons and directions: Air with East and Spring, Fire with South and Summer, Water with West and Autumn, and Earth with North and Winter.

And again, the elements are associated with the suits of the Tarot deck: Fire with Wands, Water with Cups, Air with Swords, and Earth with the suit called in various decks Coins, Disks or Pentacles. Finally, the elements can also be thought of as vertically arranged, and thus aligned with the Four Worlds of the Qabalah, which are discussed in this lesson's reading, or the five levels of being set out above.

The Four Worlds themselves form yet another system of classification of the universe, although their role in Qabalistic thought is somewhat more complex than this. They relate not only to the structure of the universe, but also to the processes of its origination and its end; furthermore, they



have a range of subtle relationships with the Tree of Life. With this in mind, you may find it of interest to return to the process of drawing the Tree of Life which you practiced in the last lesson. This process, which involves generating four mutually defining curves, provides a clear graphic image of the emergence and interrelationships of the Four Worlds. The semicircle at the top can be seen as the World of Atziluth, opening upwards toward the Infinite; the three circles descending from it, each centered on the outermost edge of the one above, can be seen as the worlds of Briah, Yetzirah and Assiah.

It is worth noting that in this diagram, the circles representing the Worlds and the points representing the Sephiroth are defined by, and define, one another. This relationship mirrors that between the Worlds and the Sephiroth themselves.

### **Reading**

At this point, you have obtained a copy of *The Mystical Qabalah* and have no doubt looked it over. Since we are using this book as a resource and as an example, and not as our sole guide to the subject, we will not be working through it in order, but will be looking at individual sections as they become relevant. (This doesn't mean that you can't read the book on your own, of course.)

For this lesson, the assigned reading is Chapter III, "The Method of the Qabalah," and Chapter IV, "The Unwritten Qabalah." If you have it by you now, it would be good to read these chapters first, before going on with the lesson. You will note that in the third paragraph of Chapter IV, Fortune says, "upon matters of historical accuracy" she stands "subject to correction to those who are better informed than I am in these matters (and their name is legion)." With the amount of research into the history of esoteric thought and practice in Europe that has gone on since her day, this is even more true now, when the work of such scholars as Frances Yates and Gershom Scholem can be bought in paperback editions. But her other point is also still good: she did not see these traditions as objects of academic study, but as a living world, from within which she wrote as a full citizen.

As you go through chapters III and IV of *The Mystical Qabalah*, compose a brief paragraph (of about five sentences) describing the ideas in each chapter which seem most interesting or important to you. Use your own words, or use phrases and sentences taken from the text, as seems best to you. Write them

down; you will be including them in the test for this lesson..

### **Exercises**

#### Tarot: The Trumps

An important part of the work with magical symbolism in this course will involve the cards of the Tarot deck you have purchased. Over the years, an enormous amount of puffery and nonsense has been written about these cards; claims of Egyptian or even Atlantean origins have been made, dozens of "original" versions designed and marketed, and promises of vast powers and importance waved about. What lies behind all this clamor is a simple and useful collection of symbolic images which can be put to many uses in Western esoteric study and practice: in a sense, the "Swiss Army knife" of Western esotericism.

At this point you will have had some time to familiarize yourself with the deck you have selected, and it is time to begin practical work. While there is a huge amount of lore on the meanings and correspondences of the cards' symbolism, this can be as much a burden as a help to the novice. For now, therefore, we will be asking you to approach the symbols and images of the Tarot in a more straightforward fashion.

Begin the first part of this lesson's exercise by dealing out all the Trumps -- that is, the cards which do not belong to any of the four suits, and which are numbered 0 to 21, often in Roman numerals -- from your deck. Put them in order by number, with 0 (the Fool) at the beginning and 21 or XXI (the World or Universe) at the end. (The remaining cards can be set aside for the time being, as they have no part in this exercise.)

Go through the stack of Trumps one at a time, looking at each of the images; try to notice each of the symbols on each of the cards while you are doing this.

Next, lay out the Trumps in order on a flat surface, so that they form a single line. This line forms a sequence or progression, and in this sequence symbols repeat themselves, sometimes in different forms. Try to follow the flow of images and ideas from Trump to Trump. You may find it useful to think of the entire series of Trumps as a story told in pictures, with the Fool as its central character. What seems to be happening in this story?

Spend as much time as seems useful doing this, and then put the Trumps away. Be sure to write up your perceptions in your

practice journal.

The second part of this lesson's practice is to be done at least two days later. From your deck, draw out two of the Trumps at random. Set them down next to one another, and examine them closely. What connections, similarities, or oppositions can you see between them? Again, continue this exercise as long as seems useful, and write up your perceptions in your journal.

The first part of the exercise need only be done once during the two weeks you spend on this lesson; the second part should be repeated four times, drawing a new pair of Trumps each time.

### Constructing the Little World

Much of the work you'll be doing in lessons to come will focus on the Tree of Life and its symbolism. You will want to make, as a tool to help you with this work, a drawing of the Tree sized to contain notes on the symbolism. As you fill it in, this diagram will truly become a "minutum mundum," a miniature world that will be far more than a mere list of symbols and correspondences.

Start with a large piece of heavy paper or tag board. Construct a Tree of Life using the method you learned in Lesson 1. Make it big, but make it as exact as possible. Draw the constructing arcs lightly, since you'll need to erase them.

At each of the ten points on the diagram that mark the Sephiroth, draw four nested circles as approximately shown below. (To draw these, set the point of the compass at 1/4 inch, 1/2 inch, 3/4 inch, and 1 inch, respectively.) These will hold the symbols of the Sephiroth in the Four Worlds of Qabalistic theory.

The Paths should be drawn to match those on the Tree of Life shown in Lesson 1. They should be at least 1/4 inch wide, to allow you to write in the Path symbolism. To center them properly, draw a light guideline lined up on the centers of the two Sephiroth that the Path connects; then draw another line to

each side of the guideline, parallel with it, say an eighth of an inch away. The guideline can then be erased. All lines should end cleanly at the outer edge of each Sefirah.

It may take several tries to make this diagram, but this should not be seen as a waste of time. The experience of constructing the Tree has lessons to teach which are well worth the time and effort involved.

This diagram must be completed and ready to use by the time Lesson 4 arrives.

Attention:  
Relaxation and Breathing

For this lesson, you will continue with the exercise you practiced in the first lesson, but with the additional of rhythmic breathing. Sit in the traditional meditation position described in the last lesson, and while you are sitting, breathe in a particular way -- inhaling, holding your breath, exhaling, and again holding your breath before inhaling. The periods of inhalation, exhalation, and stillness may all be equal (this is sometimes called "the fourfold breath," as each phase is done for a count of four), or the periods of inhalation and exhalation may be twice as long as the periods of stillness (thus 8-4-8-4). You should pick one of these, and stick with it for the duration of these lessons.

There are several points to remember in doing this. The first, and most important, is not to try to force yourself to maximum capacity or maximum compression. We are all so familiar with breathing that we take it for granted, but the sheer mechanical forces involved can actually cause damage if they are forced to extremes. The second is never to jam the throat shut during the phases of stillness. Stillness should come from stopping the movement of the muscles of the chest and abdomen (again, not by jamming them to extremes!), rather than by blocking the airway. Third, do not rely on external timers (for example, metronomes). Try to rely on your own internal counting to establish the length of the phases. Ideally, you would time the phases by your pulse or heartbeat. Naturally, the pulse does not occur with mechanical regularity -- but achieving mechanical regularity is not the point. Learning to focus one's attention is.

Breathe in and out through your nose, and use your abdomen as well as your diaphragm, filling and emptying your lungs as much as you can without strain.

You should be doing the exercise for five to ten minutes at a time at the beginning of this lesson's work. Do not increase

the time beyond twenty minutes during this lesson. Be sure to keep an account of this work in your magical record.

### Ritual

Ritual is one of the great tools of magic, and the following, known as the Qabalistic Cross, is one of the five-finger exercises of magical ritual, yet also itself a ritual that repays careful work and study. This should be done once a day, as much as possible at the same time each day. Do this at the end of your attention exercise each day, before you do the closing.

1. Stand facing East, feet together, arms at sides. Visualize yourself expanding upwards and outwards into space, until the earth can be seen like a sphere about a foot in diameter beneath your feet.

2. Raise your right hand above your head, then draw it down to your forehead. Visualize a beam of brilliant white light coming down from infinitely far above you to a point just above the top of your head, where it forms a sphere of white light, also about a foot across. Vibrate Ateh.

3. Draw your hand down to your solar plexus, and visualize the beam of light descending all the way down to the center of the Earth beneath your feet. Vibrate Malkuth.

4. Bring your hand up and across to your right shoulder, and visualize the light extending outward from the center of your chest to the right, forming one arm of a cross. Just beyond your shoulder, it forms another one-foot sphere, this time of brilliant red light. Vibrate ve-Geburah.

5. Bring your hand across to your left shoulder, and visualize the light following to form the other arm of the cross. Just beyond that shoulder it again forms a one-foot sphere, this time of brilliant blue light. Vibrate ve-Gedulah.

6. Fold your hands across your chest, crossing at the wrists, right over left. Visualize the entire Cross shining with light. Vibrate Le-Olam.

7. Bring your hands together, palms and fingers touching, forearms parallel to the ground (so that your wrists form right angles with your forearms). Breathe in, and feel the expansion of your chest this position allows. Breathing out, visualize a sphere of light expanding from the center of the cross to encompass your body and the four spheres, surrounding you with an egg of brilliant white light within which the spheres shine.

Vibrate Amen.

"Vibration" here refers to a special way of speaking. For current purposes, you should find the tone and manner of speaking (not necessarily particularly loud) that produces a vibrating or humming feeling in your body. With some practice, you may find that this feeling can be localized at the spots touched by your right hand when doing this ritual. Again, write up your results in your magical record.

At this point, do not worry too much about the correct pronunciation of the Hebrew words, which represent the perhaps familiar "Thine (Ateh) is the Kingdom (Malkuth). and the Power (ve-Geburah) and the Glory (ve-Gedulah). Pronounce the consonants as in English, except for the "th," which can be taken as simply "t", and the "g", which here should be hard, as it is in "get". Pronounce the vowels in the "Italian" way, more or less as short English vowels.

To recapitulate, then, the activities for this lesson are as follows:

First, to perform the relaxation and attention exercises daily, with the Qabalistic Cross.

Second, to perform the daily review on going to bed.

Third, to do the Tarot exercises.

Fourth, to build the Tree of Life as described.

Fifth, to keep a record of your work, and to prepare and send in the test for this lesson.

## Test

The following questions will help us track your progress through this lesson's work. As before, your answers 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. Describe two sessions of the second part of the Tarot exercise from this lesson, noting the Trumps you drew, and what connections you saw between them.

B. Copy out your accounts of two sessions of the attention exercise.

C. Compare your experiences with the attention exercise from this lesson to those with the equivalent practice from Lesson 1. What differences, if any, did the addition of rhythmic breathing seem to make?

D. Copy out the paragraphs you composed to summarize the ideas of the assigned reading.

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