

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

Lesson 4

With this lesson, the focus of your studies in this course will be undergoing a certain amount of change. The emphasis of the last three lessons has been on the elementary techniques of Western esoteric training. In this lesson and the lessons to come, however, this emphasis will alternate with a focus on the elementary theory of the tradition. Both of these, theory and practice, are useful and necessary parts of the work, and you will find that each reinforces the other; a knowledge of the essential theoretical structure of Western esotericism will give context and meaning to the practical work, while the exercises will help turn the theory from a set of dry intellectual statements to an expression of living realities.

Number Symbolism

One of the barriers to understanding that modern students of ancient magical traditions must overcome is a major difference in the idea of number -- what numbers are and what they mean. To the modern mind a number is simply a quantity of something. It has no particular meaning or importance of its own, and nothing but quantity sets it apart from any other number.

In ancient thought, and the magical traditions which derive from the ancient world, number is understood in a radically different sense. To this way of thought, any given number is a quality as well as a quantity; it has characteristics, symbolism, and meanings of its own, wholly apart from those of anything to which it might be attached. Thus the number three, for example, possesses a quality of its own, which we may as well call "threeness"; any time the quantity three appears, the quality of threeness is present; anything that naturally occurs in threes, or divides into three parts, partakes of that same quality. Time -- which divides into past, present, and future -- and the process of reproduction -- which involves mother, father, and child -- thus both are linked symbolically and magically with the number three.

Old books of Qabalistic magic contain tables of the "scales" of number symbolism, classifying an enormous range of things

natural and supernatural in terms of the number-qualities they express. These gained much of their effectiveness, however, from traditional religious and cultural symbologies which have long since dropped out of use, and the present age has yet to create any coherent set of transformative symbols of its own. Each student of these traditions, therefore, must to some extent create a personal symbolic system of this sort, combining the still useful elements of traditional systems with other material derived from personal experience. The number exercise in this lesson, and other exercises in lessons to come, will help you make a start on this phase of your magical training.

The Number One

The association of Kether, the first sephirah, with the number one may seem straightforward enough, but "one" in this connection is much more than the name for an amount, or the first place in a series. It refers specifically to the quality of unity, and all that is implied by it.

A unity is an entity, a thing that is held together in two ways: first, because all of it shares in being part of the whole, and second, because it is distinct from everything else. In other words, it is defined, or bounded: it is what it is, and not anything else. This line of thought, by the way, can be traced back through the great systematizing Neoplatonist Proclus all the way to Plato, and to the casual reader it can easily seem to be a kind of abstract logic-chopping. In fact, it is something very different: it is one part of an attempt to make systematic sense out of the experiences that arise from meditative and magical explorations.

One way to understand this is to reflect on the part of the soul that corresponds to Kether. The word "Yechidah," translated "will," is also related to words that mean "one" and "unity". This suggests the one-pointedness of the will that is so often stressed in magic: but it also, and in some ways more importantly, refers to the unifying act of the will through which we define a situation and our position within it. It is through a clear understanding of this unifying aspect of the will, in fact, that we can grasp what it means for the will to be one-pointed.

If we have a chess board, and a pile of checkers as well as a set of chess pieces, we have the option of playing any number of games. Once we decide to play chess, though, the board loses its indeterminate, open-ended quality: it becomes a chess board. Once we decide to play chess, all the other kinds of pieces become irrelevant, except to the extent that they can

represent (if necessary) chess pieces. It is the intention, or will, to play chess that makes the situation what it is: a chess game, with its own unity, in which all the pieces, and the board and even the players, participate. As we become absorbed in the game, we do not have to practice special exercises to become one-pointed: we simply follow our intentions, and let everything else fall away.

By an act or gesture of will (simple enough, though it presupposes a complex structure of already established ideas and intentions about chess, the board, the pieces, the moves, and so on) we have brought that game into being. This is what is at the root (or summit) of the Tree of Life: the acts of will, or intention, that from moment to moment, and lifetime to lifetime, bring into being the fields of action within which we act. But there is more to the will than that. The Yechidah refers not only to the will through which we act, but to the will that enacts us. In meditative and magical work, it becomes gradually clearer that at the root of our being is not only our own will, but our being willed. In the same way that we can constitute a chess game by intending to play it, so we are constituted as individuals with wills by another will, which is not our own, but which generates our will by making each of us a unity.

This constituting will is, in old-fashioned technical terms, the "scintilla" or unfallen spark that links us to the Divine. (This is mirrored in the divine name of Kether, which means "I will be," and is a shorter form of "I will be what which I will be," no doubt one of the earliest recorded formulae of existentialism.)

Symbolism of Kether

Chapter XV of The Mystical Qabalah, which you will be reading as part of this lesson, begins with a page of various symbols and correspondences associated with Kether, the first Sephirah of the Tree of Life. Such correspondences, often drawn up into complicated tables, have been a fixture of Western esoteric writings for hundreds of years. A number of modern magical writers have rejected this sort of thing as useless, but this rejection derives from a misunderstanding of the purpose and nature of correspondences.

The point of these tables is not to load down the mind of the student with materials suitable for some bizarre sort of esoteric Trivial Pursuit. Rather, correspondences serve as a way to unify and organize magical symbolism, to convert the often weird grab-bag of traditional images and ideas into a

coherent alphabet of symbols that can be used to communicate clearly with the deep levels of the mind and the subtle aspects of the universe.

To some extent, the point raised earlier in this lesson, in the discussion of number symbolism, applies here as well: much of the traditional imagery derived its force from cultural beliefs and habits of thought that have long since fallen into disuse, and thus has limited relevance to the modern student. Certain elements of symbolism are still useful, though, either because they tie into still-living ways of thought, because they link up to basic aspects of human existence, or because the surviving materials of the magical tradition are all but incomprehensible without them. It is with this rather more limited set of symbols that you will be working at this stage in your magical training.

For this lesson's work, your assignment will be to learn a selection of symbols associated with the first Sephirah. These are as follows:

The Divine Name: AHIH (pronounced Eh-heh-yeh), "I Am";

The Archangel: Metatron, Prince of the Countenances;

The Order of Angels: Chaioth ha-Qodesh, "Holy Living Creatures";

The Astrological Correspondence: Rashith ha-Gilgalim, "Beginnings of Turnings" or Primum Mobile, identified with the Galaxy as the background of stellar and planetary forces;

The Tarot Correspondence: the four Aces of the pack.

You will need not merely to familiarize yourself with these correspondences, but to commit them to memory; as you proceed with your magical training, they will become more and more important.

Finally, the first four of these symbols are to be written onto the large Tree of Life you were instructed to make back in Lesson 2. In the innermost of the four circles of Kether, write in the Divine Name and its meaning; in the next, the Archangel; in the next, the Order of Angels; and in the outermost circle, the astrological correspondence. The end result will look something like this:

Once you have written in the symbols, use a white colored pencil to color in the rest of the space, or simply leave the space blank.

Reading

The assigned reading for this lesson will be Chapter VII, "The Three Supernals," Chapter XIV, "General Considerations," and Chapter XV, "Kether, The First Sephirah" from The Mystical Qabalah. If you have not previously worked with the Western esoteric tradition, the latter two chapters may be your first introduction to full-scale magical symbolism; you may find it useful to go over the chapters several times in order to get a clearer sense of how this material is organized and how it fits together.

As you go through the chapters, compose a brief paragraph (of perhaps five sentences) describing the main ideas of each chapter. Use your own words, or use phrases and sentences taken from the text, as seems best to you. Write them down and include them in the test for this lesson.

Exercises

Number Exercise

Over the next several lessons, you'll be starting to work directly with the numerical approach to symbolism described earlier. The number you'll be working with in this lesson is the number one. Your task will be to notice, and think about, everything in your experience that can be described by, or that is linked with, this number. You may find it useful to keep a list, either in your practice journal or elsewhere, of all the manifestations of the number one in your life.

As you sensitize yourself to the presence of unities within you and around you, you may notice that they tend to fall into two or more classes. For example, some things relate to the number one by being all-inclusive, while others relate to it by being uniquely rare. Think about the relationship between these classes; as always, keep notes on the results of your work in

your practice journal.

Meditation and Attention

The method of meditation introduced in the last lesson is capable of a great deal of expansion and elaboration. For the time being, though, it will be of more value in your training for you to develop a certain level of skill with the basic technique, and with its use as a means of working with the traditional symbolism.

For this lesson, therefore, the meditation will follow the same format and process we presented in Lesson 3. Only the topic will be different. Rather than working with the four elements in general, you will explore a specific aspect of their energies through the medium of the Tarot correspondence of the First Sephirah.

When you have finished the preliminaries to meditation, then, and are ready to begin working with the topic, call to mind one of the four Aces of the deck. Picture it in your mind's eye as clearly as possible, putting as many of the card's details into the image as you can. Next, consider the image, and think about its possible meanings. This image represents the way that Kether, the First Sephirah, manifests through one of the elements, and through one of the Four Worlds. What does it communicate to you?

Be ready to draw on your previous meditations on the elements, as well as Lesson 3's Tarot exercise and this lesson's readings, to build up your sense of the symbol's meaning. Be ready, too, to go out on a limb if your intuition leads you there. The conclusions you reach, at this point in your training, are less important than the experience of reaching them. Symbols such as these will mean something a little different to everyone who works with them.

One of the goals of these meditations is to come to a clearer understanding of the meanings of the Tarot Aces. When you have finished meditating on each of the Aces, therefore, you'll need to find a single word which, for you, sums up the card and its qualities as you understand these. For example, "Power" might be the word that best describes the Ace of Wands to you, or "Unity"; "Matter" or "manifestation" might best fit the Ace of Pentacles, and so on. The words you select should be committed to memory, and sent in with your test for this lesson.

Do at least four of these meditations during the next two weeks, so that all four of the Aces and elements are covered; the

meditations can be done more frequently if you wish, up to once a day. Begin with the Ace of Pentacles for Earth and Assiah, then the Ace of Swords for Air and Yetzirah, then the Ace of Cups for Water and Briah, and finish with the Ace of Wands for Fire and Atziluth. As with the last lesson's meditation, ten minutes of actual discursive meditation should be sufficient for each practice session.

The attention exercise given in the last lesson should be repeated on any day in which you do not do a meditation as described above. Review the instructions in Lesson 3 to make sure you have not forgotten details of the practice.

Ritual

The Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram, as given in the last lesson, should be performed each day. As you work with this rite over the next two weeks, concentrate on making the visualized images as clear and bright as you can. Here, too, you'll find it useful to review the instructions given in Lesson 3 and adjust your performance as necessary.

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

First, to perform the meditation or the attention exercise each day.

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

Third, to perform the Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram each day.

Fourth, to work on the number exercise throughout the next two weeks.

Fifth, to keep a record of your work, and 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 session of meditation on Kether from your magical record.

B. Copy out an account of one working of the Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram.

C. Give the keywords for the four Aces from your meditations.

D. Describe some of the meanings you have found for the number one in this lesson's number exercise.

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.