

COMPANIONS OF THE STONE
First Degree Draft Curriculum

The following requirements have been tentatively established for advancement to the Grade of Earth. They include readings, personal practices, lodge work, the making of a working tool, and an examination.

Readings

Philosophical:

Plato, The Symposium
Plotinus, The Enneads (selections)

Practical:

Butler, W.E., The Magician: His Training and Work
Fortune, Dion, Psychic Self-Defence
The Mystical Qabalah

Regardie, Israel, Foundations of Practical Magic
Golden Dawn material (from Regardie's The Golden Dawn):
Outer Order knowledge lectures (GD, v. I pp. 99-169)
COTS instructional letters for the First Degree

A written response to each of the books should be prepared and submitted to the Companion Lecturer. This is not a book report, but simply a personal comment about what you learned from the book and how you responded to it.

Personal Practice

Continued personal work with discursive meditation, along the lines covered in the Associate material, is one of the two foundations of the COTS curriculum. The other is the practice of the Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram and the Middle Pillar exercise. Both of these should be done daily. A set of themes from meditation based on the First Degree ritual, and an instructional paper on the Middle Pillar, will be provided.

The following additional practices should be learned and put to use at this point:

- the Ritual of the Rose Cross
- introductory Scrying in the Spirit Vision, using Tarot Aces
- the Work of Light (First Degree somatic work)
- basic techniques of practical magic

Instructional letters on these subjects will be provided, and the Work of Light will be demonstrated in lodge.

Lodge Work

First Degree Companions will be expected to show a basic mastery of the procedures of a lodge open in the Outer, including protocol, the functions of the officers, movement in the lodge, and the role of the Signs, grip and passwords. Regular attendance at lodge meetings is of the highest importance, and may be considered the first requirement for advancement in the Order.

Working Tool

The working tool of a First Degree Companion is the Staff. Each Companion will be expected to provide himself or herself with a staff of the appropriate size and pattern before advancing to the Grade of Earth. The Order is currently developing materials on the use of the staff for self-defense; while work in these directions is not required, it is highly recommended.

Examination

A Companion of the First Degree may apply for examination at any time after three months have passed since his or her First Degree initiation. The Examination of the First Degree will comprise:

- demonstration by the Companion candidate of perfect knowledge of the Signs, word and symbols of the First Degree;
- demonstration by the Companion candidate of one or more of the techniques of practical magic taught in the First Degree;
- review of the Companion candidate's reading and practice;
- presentation to the lodge of a short paper, lecture or project by the Companion on any suitable topic.

The Companion Lecturer should be contacted for Examination.

COMPANIONS OF THE STONE

Instructional Letter
First Degree Series - No. 1

Meditations of the First Degree
<provisional draft 10/95>

The word "initiation" literally means "beginning." The experience of passing through a ritual initiation like the First Degree of the Companions of the Stone is precisely that. It provides a pattern of images and subtle energies which can be developed and explored through further work, done individually and in lodge.

The most important part of this work is meditation. Through the process of discursive meditation on the ideas and imagery of the First Degree, the potentials of this phase of the Companions' work can be opened up and put to use as tools for magical and personal development.

The following themes from the Degree ceremony, along with any others which you may have found striking, should be explored in this way. The instructions on the practice of meditation which you have already received should be used here.

Themes

1. Meditate on the different meanings of light and darkness as they relate to the outer world of nature and to the inner world of human consciousness. Consider what light means to you, and why; what darkness means, and why, and how these relate to each other, and why.
2. Meditate on this speech of the Chief: "The voice of my undying and secret soul said to me: let me enter the path of Darkness, for it may be that there I shall find the Light. I am the only being in an abyss of Darkness; from an abyss of Darkness I came forth before my birth, from the silence of a primal sleep."
3. Meditate on this speech of the Warden: "Cowardice is failure, and the beginning of failure. Therefore master your fear. For courage is the beginning of all virtue, and in the heart of the coward, virtue abides not; and he that trembles at the flame and the flood and the shadows of the air has no part in God."
4. Meditate on this speech of the Chief: "Unbalanced power is the ebbing away of life. Unbalanced mercy is weakness and the ebbing away of will. Unbalanced severity is cruelty and the barrenness of mind."

5. Meditate on the Word of the First Degree, EBEN, "stone." Look up the meanings of the Hebrew letters Aleph, Beth and Nun, which form it, and relate them to the events of the Degree and to the symbolism of light and darkness.

6. Meditate on the two Pillars of the Temple, and on the opposites they represent: mercy and severity, day and night, speech and silence, and all other pairs of opposites. In this context, consider this speech of the Chief: "There are two contending forces and One always uniting them. Two basal angles of the triangle and one which forms the apex. Such is the origin of creation -- it is the triad of life."

7. Meditate on the image of the Uncarved Stone, as the symbol of your own original nature, and as the raw material for the work of magical transformation.

8. Meditate on the image of the Staff, the working tool of the First Degree, and on the ideas of quest and pilgrimage.

9. Meditate on any other part of the First Degree ceremony which you found particularly striking or meaningful.

Each of these themes should be developed through several sessions of meditation, at least, and you may find it useful to return to some of the earlier ones with insights derived from the later ones. When you have explored all of them, and any other aspects of the First Degree ceremony which you wish, contact the Lecturer of your lodge for further work.

THE COMPANIONS OF THE STONE

Preliminary material for candidates
(draft version -- 2/96)

Theory

[not yet written]

Practice

One of the things that sets the Hermetic tradition most sharply apart from the mainstream Western religions, especially in their popular forms, is its insistence on practical work. In most faiths, it's enough merely to accept some set of propositions about the supernatural, and perhaps follow some rules about how to behave. This rather simple approach to the world beyond the realm of the senses probably has much to do with the popularity of these faiths, but it is not, ultimately, satisfactory. Learning to experience and work with the hidden side of reality is a skill, one which requires practice and experience. Few people who wanted to learn to ride a bicycle would be satisfied with a set of instructions that insisted that all a bicyclist needs to do is to lead a good life and believe in the existence of two-wheeled vehicles. Yet much the same approach is taken by many people toward issues that are among the most important that any human being can encounter.

According to the Hermetic tradition, **faith and a rule-keeping morality are not enough**. Without personal experience of the hidden side of existence, in fact, they are all but meaningless. Because of this, Hermetic teachings tend to focus mainly on ways of attaining and assessing such experience. In this introductory material, you'll chiefly be working with two such ways. The first is a type of meditation, the second a basic ritual.

Opening and Closing

One very simple but very important practice, the omission of which has caused quite a bit of trouble, is the use of opening and closing gestures. In the Companions of the Stone, we use a simple set of gestures that can be performed easily under most circumstances without drawing undue attention.

The opening gesture begins with the hands placed together, palm to palm at about chest level, held at an angle of about 45 degrees. Next, the hands are opened, as though they were a book; the palms face you. Third, the hands are separated and turned slightly so that the palms are facing each other, at a distance of about ten inches. Your gaze should move past your hands into the space between and beyond them, and you should at this point formulate the intention that your inner faculties are opening.

The closing gesture has the same steps, but in the reverse order. The hands, held apart but palm to palm, are rotated until both palms face you. They are then brought together, edge to edge, palms still facing you, as though you were supporting an open book on your hands. Finally, they are snapped together, as though you were snapping a book shut, with the firm intention of closing down your inner faculties. This last movement has a percussive quality; if you can actually get your hands to clap, so much the better. The opening should be performed at the beginning of an exercise; the closing at the end.

Meditation

Esoteric systems are notorious for complexity, but in an important sense all their elaborate apparatus is beside the point -- ideally, at least. It is in the space between the ideal and the actual that the systems flourish; it is the general (though not universal) human inability to do things the simple and direct way that makes them necessary.

The following practice is a concrete example of that idea. From one perspective, it is one of the basic five-finger exercises of the esotericist. From another perspective (some would say an impossibly optimistic one!), it is the only thing one needs to know or do. All other means, exercises, teachings and devices are for those who cannot do this exercise as it should be done.

From a certain point of view, again, this exercise is the key to the development of the magical will. That description, though, can be either helpful or confusing depending on how one thinks of "will". Esoterically understood, will is not exactly a matter of effortful striving; nor is the cultivation of will a matter of building up some distended, flaming, throbbing mental faculty that imposes itself on all and sundry like some big, over-familiar dog. Developed will is effortless, simple, almost unconscious, and has its effect with a minimum of fuss. The same thing is true of concentration. Effective concentration is not a matter of gripping one thing tightly, but of simply letting everything else go, as though you scooped up a handful of sand and rocks from the bottom of a stream, and let the water carry away everything but the one pebble you wanted.

This exercise should be done if possible at the same time every day, or at the same time in your daily cycle -- for example, just after waking, or just before dinner. It's best not to do it on a full stomach. The exercise itself is done in three phases, and these phases should be learned one at a time unless you have previous experience with this kind of meditation. Give the first two phases two or three days each, then go on to the third.

First Phase

The first phase is simple in the extreme: sit, without moving, for the duration of the exercise, which for the time being should be five minutes.

It's hard to get more simple than that...but, of course, "simple" is not necessarily the same thing as "easy."

A good position for sitting -- it is, in fact, the usual position for seated meditation in this tradition -- is to sit in a straight-backed chair that allows you to have your feet flat on the floor, and your thighs parallel to the floor, so that your back is straight and your hands can rest on your thighs. Don't

worry about whether you are relaxed or tense. If you find uncomfortable or intrusive tensions, you may relax them if you can do so without changing position. Don't, however, try to maintain a rigid immobility -- if nothing else, simply breathing will make your body move, and you will notice perhaps other movements as well. Simply attend to the sensations of being in your physical body.

Try always to bring your attention back to your body, without focusing on any particular part of it. Feel it as a unified whole, both in tactile (touch) and kinesthetic (the inner awareness of muscles and position) terms. Certain sensations may intrude: you may find yourself feeling discomfort, or restlessness, or itching, for example. Do not try to flinch away from these sensations, but attend to them calmly and easily, putting them in the context of all your other sensations.

Second Phase

The second phase adds the factor of rhythmic breathing. Sitting in the same posture, breathe in a particular way -- inhaling to the count of four, holding your breath to the same count, exhaling to the same count, and again holding your breath to the same count before inhaling. This method is called "the fourfold breath." If you prefer a slightly slower rhythm, 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 this introductory work.

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.

While working with this phase alone, five to ten minutes is a good minimum time; twenty is a maximum.

Third Phase

The complete practice combines the first two phases with a particular way of thinking. To begin, sit in the position given under the first phase, and become still. Then, for approximately five minutes, do the rhythmic breathing of the second phase.

When this period is finished, turn your mind to the topic of the meditation, which is given below. Think about it in a general way for a time, and then choose some particular aspect of the topic, or a train of thought connected with it, and follow that out as far as it will go, considering all the ideas that your mind associates with it.

For example, if the topic for your meditation is the element of Earth, you might decide to consider Earth as soil, as the source of plant life and growth; this might lead you to think of the yearly cycle of vegetative life, or of fertility in general, and either or both of these might lead on to the thought of the lunar cycle, and of the Moon; and these ideas in turn might lead you on to others. However far afield the connections go, try to link them back to the original topic, and to other ideas you have come up with in the course of the meditation.

For this lesson, the topic for your meditations will be the four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. Even if you have learned the traditional symbolism of these elements previously, try to focus on the actual physical experience of the elements themselves, and let ideas arise from this, rather than from correspondences you may have learned. In this way, you will begin to develop your own personal grasp of the meaning of these important symbols.

For the time being, you should plan on spending ten minutes or so doing actual discursive meditation in each session. When you are finished, repeat a few more cycles of rhythmic breathing and attention, and then close with the closing gesture. After each session, note down the ideas that have arisen in connection with the topic, as well as any factors which seem to have helped or hindered the meditative process.

Daily Review

Every night, before you fall asleep, think back over the events of the day in reverse, as though you were watching a film running backwards. Start with the events that took place just before beginning the review, go to the events before those, and so on, back to what you did on waking up that morning. At this stage, do not try to judge or assess the things you remember. Just observe them. A reasonable amount of detail is appropriate, but the exercise should not take more than fifteen minutes or so. If you should fall asleep while doing the exercise, this is not a failure; your mind will have continued to go back over the day's activities while you slept.

The Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram

Ritual is one of the great tools of magic, and the following is one of the five-finger exercises of magical ritual. At the same time, it is itself a ritual that repays careful work and study. Many groups in the modern magical community use it, or one of several rituals closely based on it, so you may well have learned it elsewhere; still, the Companions of the Stone use the specific version given here, and it should be learned and memorized.

The Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram should be practiced once a day, as close as possible to the same time each day. You'll need a private room, with enough space to walk around in a circle without bumping into furniture. The first part of the ritual, which is called the Qabalistic Cross, is done as follows:

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 ("ah-teh").
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 ("mahl-kooth").
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 ("veh geh-boo-rah").
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 ("veh ge-dyoo-lah").
6. Fold your hands across your chest, crossing at the wrists, right over left. Visualize the entire Cross shining with light. Vibrate Le-Olam ("leh oh-lam").
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 or chanting that produces a vibrating or humming feeling in your body. For now, experiment with different tones. You may find, with practice, that the vibration can be focused in the places you touch with your right hand.

If you've never done the Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram before, you'll find it useful to practice the Qabalistic Cross on its own for one week before taking up the rest of the ritual.

The Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram as a whole is done as follows:

1. Stand facing East, in the center of your practice space, and perform the Qabalistic Cross.
2. Step forward to the East. Using the first two (middle and index) fingers of your right hand, trace a banishing pentagram in the air as shown below. It should be about three feet across. While tracing it, visualize a line of blue-white light being drawn by your fingers as they move through the air. Then point to the center of the pentagram and vibrate the Divine Name YHVH (pronounced "ye-ho-wah").

Banishing Pentagram of Earth

Begin here

3. From the center of the Eastern pentagram, trace a blue-white line around to the South, tracing out a quarter of a circle. At the Southern point of the circle, trace a second banishing pentagram. Then point to the center of the pentagram and vibrate the Divine Name ADNI ("ah-doh-nye").
4. From the center of the Southern pentagram, trace the next quarter of the circle to the West, again visualizing a line being drawn; there trace another banishing pentagram, point to its center, and vibrate the Name AHIH ("eh-heh-yeh").
5. From there, continue to the North in the same way, and again trace a banishing pentagram and at its center vibrate the name AGLA ("ah-geh-la").
6. Complete the circle by tracing the line back to the center of the pentagram at the East. Return to the center, and face East. You are now standing in the middle of a visualized circle of blue-white light, set with blazing stars at the four questers.

Extend your arms out to the sides, as though in the shape of a cross, and say:

Before me, Raphael (Rah-fa-el)
Behind me, Gabriel (Gah-bree-el)
At my right hand, Michael (Mee-khah-el)
At my left hand, Auriel (Oh-ree-el)
For about me flame the pentagrams
And within me shines the six-rayed star.

While saying this, visualize the Archangels as towering winged angelic figures outside the pentagrams at the quarters of the circle. Raphael, wearing yellow and purple, carries a sword; Gabriel, wearing blue and orange, carries a cup; Michael, wearing red and green, carries a staff; and Auriel, wearing citrine (a brownish yellow), olive (a muddy brown-green), russet (a rusty red-brown) and black, carries a pentacle (a disk inscribed with a five-pointed star). As each name is pronounced, the figure expands or springs from the point at the center of the Name at the center of the pentagram, rising a little outward, but with the pentagram somewhat within it. When you refer to the pentagrams, direct your attention to their vivid presence around you. When you speak of the six-rayed star, see a Star of David on your chest, the upward-pointing triangle in red, the downward-pointing one in blue.

7. Repeat the Qabalistic Cross. This completes the ritual.