

COMPANIONS OF THE STONE

Instructional Letter
First Degree Series - No. 7

The Work of Light

The central theme of the First Degree of our Order is the emergence of Light in darkness. This has many different aspects and applications in our work.

In ordinary states of consciousness, we routinely treat the world of our experience as a collection of objects that are wholly distinct from us. We encounter these objects as though they were surfaces and nothing more, with no inner life of their own and no presence in the realm of consciousness other than that which we arbitrarily give them. This approach to the world is functional in many situations, but it tends to get in the way of many kinds of magical work.

It is thus useful to explore other ways of interacting with the world, and to allow the light of awareness to dawn in aspects of the universe we normally think of as opaque. The following exercises are intended to begin this process by working with the relationships between awareness and the physical -- and in particular, the physical body. Each Grade of the First Degree has further exercises along these same lines, which build toward certain crucial magical skills.

These practices may be done in any position, although the seated position used for meditation is often the most convenient. They should be opened with the usual opening gesture, followed by the Qabalistic Cross, and closed by the Qabalistic Cross, followed by the usual closing gesture. One session a week is normally enough to enable the full sequence to be completed in the three month minimum period between the First Degree and the Grade of Earth.

Exercise One

Find a comfortable, balanced position, and begin to pay careful, systematic attention to how your body feels. Let attention focus and pool in the fingers of one hand, and then let it well up into the arm, up to the shoulder. When one arm is established as a pool of attention, and you are clearly aware of how that entire arm feels from fingertips to shoulder, maintain that awareness as you begin the same process with the other arm. Then allow each leg, one after the other, to fill with attention, starting from the toes and allowing attention to well upwards. Then allow the pools of attention in the legs to join, to fill the abdomen and chest with attention, to join with the arms, so that the whole body up to the neck is a unified pool of attention. Then allow that pool to well upward to the top of the head.

Do not try to visualize any of this; simply focus on somatic sensation. If images arise, or if thoughts or sounds intrude, simply allow them to pass away. If your attention wanders, bring it back. Once the entire body is a single pool of attention, and you are aware of how every part of it feels, hold that awareness for a time, then release it and close.

Exercise Two

When you have practiced Exercise One often enough to be able to establish the unified pool of attention easily, begin including other sensations -- sound, taste, smell and vision -- to the somatic focus already established. (If you are practicing with closed eyes, visual sensations include those shifts in color and form that present themselves against the darkness of the closed eyes.) Keep the sense of the single pool of attention, so that you are aware of being aware of all these things. Finally, add the "inner" sensations of mental events such as thoughts, emotions and the like. At the conclusion of this phase, every perception is included in the single pool of attention, a pool that remains centered in your body and its sensations but that radiates outward to include the entire universe of your present experience.

Exercise Three

At some point it may become apparent that the breath is linked with the texture or quality of attention -- which may be experienced as more collected or concentrated during the inbreath and more diffuse or expanded during the outbreath. If this perception does not occur of itself, take the time to establish it, since the link between attention, intention and breath is central to many of the later developments of these skills. Spend some time cultivating this linkage, gradually deepening the extent to which the concentration and dispersion of attention with the breath penetrates and permeates all sensation.

Exercise Four

Once this has been developed and explored, add the element of visualization. At first establish the pool of attention, as before; then, as though turning a switch, be aware of infinite light permeating all things, including yourself. The movement of awareness with your breath is mirrored by an ebb and flow of the light, which washes through your body. Feel every small part of yourself penetrated by this tidal motion of the light, which becomes more and more penetrating; let your attention rest in the light. The effect, gradually, is that the things washed in the light move more and more into the background, as though at a great distance. The light fills the minutest spaces, and

everything exists in its presence.

As you become used to this final phase of the exercise, you may become aware of the Sphere of Sensation, an egg-shaped region of space surrounding your physical body. If this awareness does not occur on its own, though, you will find it useful to seek for it, and try to perceive the region within the Sphere of Sensation as an intermediary realm between the unbounded light and your physical body, while the boundaries of the Sphere act as filters and interfaces that mediate the tidal flow of the light.

A Final Note

The physical body is the anchor for many aspects of the self-image, and -- human beings being what they are -- the various falsifications that are part of the self-image have their subtle reflections in the physical body as well. For this reason, systematic work with attention directed at the physical body can sometimes stir up a range of emotional and somatic reactions. These will dissipate if met with clear, non-judgmental attention, but the experience can still be somewhat troubling in some cases. If disturbing sensations arise during any of these practices, the Lecturer of your lodge can direct you to Adept Companions who are experienced in this particular facet of our work, and who can offer assistance if this is needed.