Ethics Stone—Minimalist Altar-Building

Course document, Deicidus, Internet School of Magic

*As always, please leave questions and comments in the document if you do not mind sharing them with other students. This makes it much faster and easier for me to answer the questions, in-context. This document will be publically viewable.*

This activity will help to introduce you to practical magic (‘Questing’) and a number of concepts and directions in my work. It’s intended and designed for someone new to magic, and for someone who either does not have an altar or who has an altar packed with too many things—my method is minimalist and these exercises will show how a minimalist altar can function.

**A few definitions for *ethics*:**

* The most important thing—your world-center or axis mundi—the point around which we pivot
* “What we do to try to be free.” —Lynn Fendler’s describing Michel Foucault’s stance
* “Treating every thing that enters our experience with respect.” —Thanh Phung

**A few considerations regarding minimalism—**A sorcerer or wizard’s power is in the objects they keep. That is, the more objects you possess, the less power you have free access to—the power becomes stored in the object as an interface. This can be helpful, but it also crystallizes your life into a number of “power objects” or “pieces of 9” which contain and isolate your power and limit your access to it. Every object we possess does this—and for most people their possessions are very messy and have no clear purpose or function. For sorcery, we must learn to organize our objects and sort and process their karmic loads in real-time; and for wizardry, we must learn to acquire, utilize, and reintegrate power objects into our lives and to remove powerless objects from our lives. This is why the classic image of a wizard is a wanderer who has a few possessions and who bestows magic items upon a few select individuals whom they meet.

**Introductory reading—**my essay [My personal curriculum: Reflections on autodidacticism and the psychogeography of curriculum](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OdzT0ypnUSkRlorZ4vTOlxp1-V5xisPUSSaf2VAIoNA/edit#heading=h.hvq720zhux7a). This essay will explain the concept of an “axis mundi” and the psychological geography (psychogeography) of defining a world-center in your life.

# Step 1—Pick up a stone and carry it with you. Define it as a self-love and self-care stone.

**Most people have been abused** in their life and have been taught that self-love and self-care are unacceptable or even worthy of hatred and resentment. Fighting this instinct and championing our own well-being and placing ourselves at the top of the hierarchy of people who care for us is the first step in taking control of our lives and defining ourselves into a magical world.

This exercise will help you to strengthen your resolve to love and care for yourself, and to champion your own self-interests (obviously, not in a way which hurts or diminishes others—and, this disclaimer is only necessary because we have been taught that self-care harms others! Which is obviously a manipulative untruth intended to keep us dependent upon others). If you think you are already very self-loving, this exercise will help you to either confirm that or begin to notice the areas in which your self-love has gaps. It was originally designed to help someone recover from

depression, and when they did the exercise it helped.

So here it is: **Go outside and pick up a stone, any stone.** Choose the first stone that jumps out at you as glowing, pretty, or special. The first stone you like. Pick it up and carry it with you, in your pocket, all the time. This is your ‘ethics stone’. It defines your axis mundi, your world-center, and it symbolizes (because you are defining it so) your self-love and self-care. After you work with it enough, it will become the primary center of your altar (and can later be replaced by a statue or something if you like).

# Step 2—Throw the stone away and replace it whenever it becomes covered by a haze of ignoring

Here we are doing two things: **noticing** our reactions to our own stone that we have defined as a self-care and self-love stone, and we are beginning to explore what an **‘esoteric substance’** might be or mean. For example, the original person I designed this activity for was very depressed. He was experiencing what I was labeling as a “miasma” or a “haze of miasma” that was surrounding him and changing his experience of his environment to a depressive/depressing one. If you have experienced depression (and who hasn’t?) you know what I mean: things get fuzzy, you feel heavy and tired, everything can be scary and overwhelming, and things seem to jump out at you from these ‘mists’.

Instead of working from a psychological or psychiatric model and defining this as something that is in the person’s head, let’s try working from a magical model and see what that does for us. The way we define and react to our situations are just programs in our head, so let’s try this new program and see if it is useful. Suppose we define this miasma my client was experiencing as an esoteric substance, a ‘haze’ that can both cover and surround a person, and simultaneously (they are the same thing seen from inverted perspectives) cover or ‘enchant’ objects. This way of looking at things defines an enchantment as simultaneously an enchantment of the world, an observed object, and the observing person. At the same time, it defines an act of sorcery, a pivot into a parallel realm or way of experiencing—a parallel reality.

...And, interestingly, it sets up our ethics-stone as **a weapon of disenchantment**. The breaking of illusions, the return to clarity and purity, health and wellness, and the ability to pivot oneself and one’s reality with free choice. (Just like one of the strengths of white magic in Magic: The Gathering: disenchantment, banishing, etc.)

**So, whenever you 1) forget about your ethics stone for a significant amount of time, or 2) take out your ethics stone and notice some kind of haze on it**, here is what you do: Walk outside, **throw the stone away forcefully** (into a forest or something would be perfect, but be careful of breaking things! a hard throw is not necessary if you don’t have the space—the point is to get it away from you, symbolize you are done with it, and to lose it so you can’t find it again), **and then go grab a new stone** and make that your new ethics stone.

The haze on your stone can be very subtle—and a haze that is extremely subtle need not be treated as a problem. We are working here with *noticing*. So you want to just handle the stone, be patient, and **see if you *notice* any emotions towards the stone that are negative**. That is the key: we are defining negative emotions not as something inside us that we become aware of, but as an esoteric substance outside of us which we automatically notice and can react to. This provides us with an enormous amount of liberty in dealing with our emotions, because it removes them from their prison in our hearts and allows us to more honestly perceive them as inhered in objects or people—*without* discarding our responsibility to them as “my emotions”. **To pretend (or assume) that the emotions (esoteric substances) which we see inhered in objects are true qualities of that object is disrespectful to both our emotions and the object, and should be avoided. It is also dangerous and can lead to being drawn into illusions.** So, be careful with your attributions, and allow the esoteric substances to be ‘out there’ without denying that they are yours and that others may not see them at all.

So, notice whenever you feel a negative emotion towards your stone, and then notice that emotion as a fluidic substance which has inhered in the stone and changed its actual qualities (as experienced by you). Common emotions you may quickly experience when you look at your self-love and self-care stone include: hatred, resentment, annoyance, fear, boredom, anger, despair, dispassion, irritation, or extreme but passing tiredness. These are all esoteric substances generated by programs you have been taught, programs which tell you it is not okay to love yourself or to take care of yourself. So throw that stone and its accumulated garbage away and get a new one! Throwing the stone away is a defiant act of rejection of the accumulated negative self-emotions, and it turns the stone into a pump you can use to gradually suck out the venom of self-hate we have virtually all been inoculated with.

One key here is that it is the *same stone*. You are karmically shuffling your possessions: if your stone gets tainted, you toss it and go find it again, but in another form. Your ethics stone is a magical shapeshifting object that will always come back to you—any stone will do and do *just right* if you let it, and if you choose the stone that jumps out at you as a beautiful stone when you go looking.

# Step 3—Settle down with your stone as the center of a minimalist altar

Once you can go for a few weeks at a time without noticing your ethics stone has become polluted—once you have a fondness for your ethics stone and your project of self-care—once the stone begins to glow with a mild rosy esoteric substance of *self-love*—once your ethics stone begins to feel like a friend and ally you can rely upon, even draw power from in times of stress—*that* is when you place it at the center of your world to begin an altar.

Choose the place you start your altar intuitively. Simply wander around your house or bedroom and choose the best spot. Just as you chose each stone you picked up, go with the spot that first jumps out at you, that seems right, that glows (with *numinosity,* Carl Jung called it). You will easily find the best place for your altar if you simply choose it.

Place the stone using your intuition to nudge it to exactly the “center” of the space you have chosen. Tada! Done. This exact spot is now the center of your world, the axis around which you are defining your objective space. (Similarly, the axis running through your head and spine or chakras define your subjective axis or mobile altar.) Imagine a vertical line (an axis) going through the stone from infinitely far below to infinitely far above. This is the link and the ‘understanding-visualization’ or mathematics we will begin using to bridge the world. (I call it an ‘understanding-visualization’ because it is not simply an imagining; it begins to blur the line between seeing, knowing, and visualizing—math.)

Feel free to replace the stone further if it becomes polluted. However, at this point it would be better to begin learning to cleanse the stone (i.e., cleanse your emotions) rather than simply throwing away your center-symbol yet again. Try meditation on self-love and self-care, and expand this to include others as well (google “metta meditation”, it is very simple). The stone will give you a lovely focus for this meditation. Other techniques of cleansing will come in other lessons—my favorite is questing.

# Step 4—Read the introductory essay if you haven’t yet

For more information on the importance of the ethics-stone and how it functions to define a world-axis (*axis mundi)*, see my essay also linked above, [My personal curriculum: Reflections on autodidacticism and the psychogeography of curriculum](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OdzT0ypnUSkRlorZ4vTOlxp1-V5xisPUSSaf2VAIoNA/edit#heading=h.hvq720zhux7a). It goes into some detail about the issues discussed here, particularly autodidacticism (“I am my own teacher before others are my teacher”) and the creation of sacred spaces (by defining an axis mundi, a space is created/defined).

Comments? You can highlight this word and press Control-Alt-M to leave a comment.