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The Hermetic Alchemy Essays

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ESSAY ONE

Of the Basis and Creation of Physical Reality

It would not be far fetched to suggest that much of the alchemists' understanding of the nature of the laboratory process is based on the Hermetic view of ideas about the nature of the condition which is the underlying basis of physical reality, and how physical reality grows out of that 'basis' condition.

To the old alchemists the entire canon of laboratory practice revolved around one laboratory technique, which itself is composed of a number of steps and has one specific goal. The technical terminology which is central to an understanding of alchemy, the names which the old alchemists often gave to specific substances and operations, were given with a view to their understanding of the place the substance or operation held in this single laboratory technique.

When we define what we consider the meaning of alchemy to be, we should consider, firstly, that alchemy is a specific way of manipulating substances, conditions and situations in any area of human endeavour. When we say ... this is alchemy, or, that is alchemical ... we are considering alchemy as a verb (a word describing an action), because 'alchemy' is a name for a specific method of manipulating things. So, for example, there may be ten ways to produce a transmutation agent (a substance which is like the philosopher's stone), but any one of these methods can only be considered to be 'alchemical' if it adheres strictly to the spagyric method of achieving the goal. Whatever the other kinds of methods might be, they would not be following the alchemical approach.

The method which is specific to alchemy, which Paracelsus rightly called the 'spagyric method', has been described by

many of the old Adepts to be a microcosmic process based on the way in which nature herself brings substances into physical reality, maintains them here, and then decomposes them and removes them from physical reality. Therefore, when the expert alchemist is meditating on the operations of his lab work he is attempting, in his mind's eye, to build up a picture of the corresponding relationship between his lab technique and the system that is the mechanism of physical reality. In this way his laboratory process becomes an analogical model of nature's process, and by contemplating the former, he can come to more deeply understand the less obvious, and secretive, processes hidden in nature's machinery. By this means the alchemist can eventually come to 'see' the way in which nature herself deals with the Great Work of evolving substances, conditions and situations toward (what I refer to as) the Q-state (the quintessence). Because the specific method of work which gives alchemy its character has the end goal of producing quintessences from the substances, conditions and situations it operates on.

If the above situation is an accurate definition of alchemy, then when attempting to come to an accurate practice of the alchemical method we must first understand just what the old Master Alchemists understood by the spagyric process ... the method by which nature creates, sustains and decomposes the pieces of our reality which compose physical (and psychological) nature.

Our understanding of the alchemical process of the creation of our reality must begin with an understanding of the unified field which forms the non-physical basis of physical reality, and from which physical reality emerges. The old Hermetic Adepts referred to this 'condition' usually by one of four names: either the Anima Mundi (spirit of the world), the Chaos (or Hyle), the Prima Materia Remotissima (remotest first matter) or the astral light (or firmament). If we were going to use a modern term to label this condition of nature we might call it the collective (or

universal) unconscious. That is ... the ground-bed of physical reality is an aspect of the mind.

The term Anima Mundi (which you can see used in the Catena Homeri - The Golden Chain of Homer) speaks of this place in nature as being the mind or spirit of nature. We might also call it the memory of nature, and this idea is associated with the concept of the alchemical 'Chaos of the Elements'. A place where the bits of nature which are the basic building blocks of our reality ... the 'Elements' ... are all mixed up together in like a soup of potential rules or patterns. This condition of nature is also the remote first matter because in a manner it is the 'stuff' from which our reality is constructed, even though it is a non-physical stuff. It is the 'astral' (of the stars) light, because of two ideas: (1) the fact that (as Paracelsus points out) the ancients often talked about the mind, the non-physical side of our reality, as being a firmament (starry heaven), and (2) because the first place where the 'matter' of this mind-field enters physical reality is through the stars. (See the Golden Chain for a more detailed explanation).

If you refer to the diagram I have attached to this email, this source-field of reality is represented by the sphere which contains the number '1' with the symbol for infinity above it. I have also labeled this sphere 'mind' because it is the place in nature where 'information' is stored. As such, this information is stored in such a way that it forms the intellect of nature. This aspect of nature is that which alchemists refer to as the alchemical Principal, Mercury. (Note: not 'Principle' - an ideal, but 'Principal' - a foremost thing). The alchemists called this thing Mercury not because, as is often assumed, it is a medium between man and the gods, but because Mercury is the *medium of communication*. That is, it is the means by which intellect expresses itself. Language and speech are the structure and vehicle of intellect ... of information.

This part of our reality is where all of the information about reality is stored. It is the memory of nature. For example, when an embryo is conceived in the womb, and is beginning its development there, the instructions it receives from nature about how it must be structured and how it must develop are stored in the Anima Mundi (universal unconscious). In the same way, when an atom arrives in to physical reality, the information which tells the atom how it should be structured and how it must behave ... the 'rules' which govern the nature of an atom ... are stored in the Anima Mundi. The patterns for all things are in this way stored in the Anima Mundi, and tell all things how they must be formed, how they will develop, and how they must decompose at the end of their existence. By this means 'everything' in nature has the Principal Mercury within it. Everything has information within it that tells it how it must be structured and how it is allowed to behave. The rules of its existence. (See Rupert Sheldrake on the subject of Morphogenic fields).

In its native state this Anima Mundi is a chaos ... an homogeneous soup of the Elements of creation and existence. Because it is homogeneous we can say that relative to our existence this Anima Mundi exists in a 'unified state'. It is a state of nature which is in equilibrium. A state which is in harmony with itself. For this reason the old Hermetic Adepts liked to represent this Anima Mundi, mathematically, by the number '1'. If we take a close look at the famous Emerald Tablet of Hermes, we can see there some essential ideas about this 'One' state described. In fact we can say that the Emerald Tablet is a description of what the One State is, and how it evolves into our reality, exists here, develops, and reaches its zenith.

This unified-field, the Anima Mundi, exists behind physical reality ... and because we can equate this state with 'the mind' this gives us a reference point when trying to contemplate just what this unified-field might be like. Because we all have a mind

and we all know a little about that. In my diagram, then, everything above the dashed line (d) is non-physical - or 'mind matter'.

Now, the problem with this unified-field is that because everything contained in it exists in a state of balance, where each of its parts is in harmony with the others, no growth or evolution can happen in that state. In order to have growth we must have a condition where one thing can relate to another thing. In other words, we must have a 'two-thing' condition, which does not exist in the Anima Mundi. So the Anima Mundi is simply a store-house. It is not a place where things grow and develop. Because of this, if we want to grow and develop ... to 'express' all that is 'potential' in the Anima Mundi, we must create another condition where that can be possible. In the more religious descriptions of Hermetic theory this situation is sometimes explained as ... God (the Sole existent One Creator), decided to extend out from Himself, and by doing-so, divide Himself in to two halves, or in two.

In the attached diagram we can see this 'act' in parts 'a' and 'b' - which are the 'will' of God (the creative act) to move from One to become Two.

When this occurs we have now in existence everything we see in the diagram below the line 'd'. Everything below the line 'd' is what we commonly refer to as our reality, or physical reality, and which we might technically refer to as Binary existence.

This binary condition is the very foundation of our reality. We might say it is the universal and ultimate 'rule' that governs everything we experience in our reality after the unified condition. Because of this we can never find anything here that is unified and wholly in balance with itself. Because unified and completely balanced things are always stored in the non-physical, beyond the average person's reach. Therefore, when

we are investigating our reality, which is based on binary law, everything we find here displays this binary nature. From this fact we get things like ... male and female things. Positive and negative electric poles. Positive and negative magnetic poles. Day and night. Up and down. Left and right. Back and forward. Fixed and volatile, observer and observed, etc, etc.

In the most fundamental understanding of alchemy this binary condition and rule of nature is encapsulated in the symbolism of the two-thing view of the alchemical process, which we see in symbols such as the King and Queen; the Lion and Eagle; the winged and wingless dragons, etc. When alchemists are describing their laboratory process in terms of these binary symbols, they are telling us that they are looking at their process from the point of view of the binary law which governs any 'cosom (micro or macro).

In the diagram I have included here these binary conditions are the spheres labeled '2' with a '+' symbol and '3' with a '-' symbol, respectively. All things in manifest reality are both part of some binary, as well as containing a binary. So, for example, you yourself are part of a male-female biological binary. But you also contain within yourself a male-female psychological binary (akin to Jung's anima and animus). So each part of a binary is also a binary in itself ... and in this way 'all' things are subject to binary law.

I have also labeled the poles of the binary condition (2) 'Energy' and (3) 'Form'. In this way the energy pole of the binary is where the system gets its fuel and power from. In the terms of modern physics this is what is recognised as heat, work or energy in any system and the laws of thermodynamics stem from this pole. The 'form' pole is what gives dynamic (living) systems there structure. In the terms of alchemy 'energy' is referred to as the Principal 'Sulphur', because mineral sulphur burns and is associated with heat, fire, light and expansion. It is the expansion faculty of the Sulphur Principal that allow the

'unit' (1) to expand and become a two-thing (binary). The form pole is referred to by alchemists as the Principal 'Salt', the reason for which should be obvious when we consider that it is the basis of all structure. Again, in the terms of modern physics, the energy and form poles of the binary are governed by the laws of the conservation of matter and the conservation of energy ... which tell us that we cannot change the amount of energy and matter in the universe (the quantity is finite), but that they may be converted the one into the other.

We cannot forget, though, that while all things we commonly experience are defined and based upon binary law, at their root is a unified harmonious commonality (the 1 sphere), and that because that unity is the origin or source of everything else, it maintains the position of ruler or governor. Because of this there is always an urge within the binary state to return to the unity state. In animals, for example, this is the source of the urge to procreate. In Hermetic philosophy, it is the basis for the ideal that 'love' is the governing force in the universe.

But the Creator did not create the binary reality so that it can be escaped from. It was created for a specific purpose, and that is because in unity no growth can occur, and the Creator desired evolution and expression. So the binary reality was created in order to stimulate and support growth and development. But because everything in binary existence possesses an urge to return to unity (balance), in order for the two poles of the binary mechanism to be kept apart another force had to be created that would maintain binary existence. This fourth force I have labeled 's' in my diagram.

This 's' force is the very thing that sustains binary (physical) reality. Without it everything we know would collapse back into passive unity. Because the 's' force maintains binary reality ... and that in order for a binary to exist, each pole of a binary must be to some degree out of balance, the 's' force is also the maintainer of imbalance, opposition, tension, conflict and ...

decay. From this angle the 's' force is the origin of what modern physics refers to as entropy (the predisposition of things to decay if energy is not imposed on them to be maintained in good condition).

In the process of their work real alchemists (as I pointed out earlier) are always concerned with attaining the goal of producing Q-state materials. In doing so their interest must always be attracted not to the perfection in things, but to the imperfection (the 's' force) that exists within things. Because it is the 's' force which forces things to be imperfect, and it is only by neutralising or removing the effect of the 's' force that a substance can be perfected and allowed to embody the attributes that are found in the unity (One) state. If the real alchemist wants to succeed in his or her work, a full knowledge and understanding of the nature of the 's' force and its mystery must be grasped. In this way the alchemist could be said to be focused on producing substances in which the force of entropy is negated.

So in this diagram, and my explanation, we have what we might consider is the most basic view of what any living (dynamic) system is composed of, alchemically. The structure of this mechanism and its dynamic, and how that structure and dynamic can be manipulated, are the focus of the alchemist and the alchemical process. This is how things are 'built' and it is from this understanding that we can next consider how things work ...

ESSAY TWO

The Evolution of Things

In my last post I explained how I have come to understand the process by which a living system appears in our reality, and the basic natural laws which govern such a living system. In this short essay I would like to explain how I understand such a living system is maintained in this reality, and how it evolves here.

Two defining factors affect the condition in which a living system comes in to our reality. The first is the fundamental blue print for the system that exists in the collective or universal unconscious. This first factor provides everything that is necessary to a species of living system, in the way of information it requires for its existence. The second factor is the personal unconscious. This influences the developing living system on an individual (as opposed to a collective) basis. In this way issues which are personal to the individual affect the way its system develops, in order that issues that must form part of the individual's existence unfold in that system's life time.

It should be understood that from an esoteric point of view the definition of a living system includes all 'complete systems' which enter our reality, have a life span, and exit our reality. Thus: atoms > minerals > metals > molecules > cells > botanical organs > plants > biological organs > animals > social groups > species > ecosystems > planets > Stars > planetary systems > galaxies, etc are all considered by alchemists to be living systems. This is because they all originate in the 'unity', manifest in the binary, are composed of the three Alchemical Principals, are born, live and die ... and while alive, evolve.

During the period, which we call 'life', that a living system is immersed in our reality, all of its experience is recorded by its

personal unconscious '1'. (See attached diagram). As explained earlier the sphere '1' is both mind and the storehouse of memory. In its role as memory storage the unconscious is like a recorder. In it records everything the living system experiences, both internally, and from its environment. As these memories accumulate at the personal level they are passed on to the collective unconscious, since the personal unconscious and the collective are linked (e). In this way, as an example, each individual rose bush that exists in the world originates from the 'rose bush' species collective unconscious, a subdivision of the universal unconscious. As each rose bush which is alive, at any one time, journeys through its daily experience - dealing with soil conditions, weather, insects, diseases, the influence of gardeners, etc, all of these experiences, and the individual plant's reactions to them, are recorded in the personal unconscious of the plant. Then the accumulated experiences of the thousands of plants around the world are downloaded into the rose bush collective unconscious, where the accumulated experience of every rose bush that has ever lived, and will ever live, is stored. In this way everything that is to be known about the concept 'rose bush' is stored there in the collective mind of the species.

Part of the role of the collective data base of information about the species, stored in its collective mind, is that this information 'tweaks' the blue print for the rule about what a rose bush is, how it is structured and how it should function. So when each new germinating rose bush seed sparks into life, and accesses its collective unconscious for the 'structure and function' information stored there ... what it becomes is determined by the information accumulated in the rose bush unconscious.

Now, as I pointed out earlier, the information that resides in the collective unconscious is static, in that it cannot, in its own environment, grow and develop. So in order to grow and develop the binary universe had to be created, where evolution

is then possible. So each time a new rose bush seed germinates, and brings with it the present state of the rose bush data as part of its nature's instruction on how to grow and function in the binary world ... as that rose bush itself now grows, based on the old data, it is adding to that data collection through its own experience in life. In this way as conditions in the binary world themselves evolve and change, the information each rose bush collects about its life upgrades the rose bush collective storehouse of memory. By this means an information loop is created, the end result of which is that the information about roses is constantly being updated by thousands of individual nodes of its own species.

This scenario can be visualised in a simple manner by the structure of the diagram I have attached to this email. In the diagram we can see a large circle labeled 'collective unconscious'. This circle is in nature of infinite size. It exists at a level of reality which has no limits, and therefore it is capable of storing an infinite amount of information (relatively speaking). This large circle represents the memory storage of a species ... for example, the rose bush. But it could be any species, such as the memory of the hydrogen atom; or the memory of all ant eaters; or the collective memory of all homo sapiens. All of these 'species' collective unconscious memory stores are themselves part of a large 'unconscious' which the old alchemists referred to as the Anima Mundi (spirit of the world). Then the collective unconscious of our planet (world) is itself part of a collective unconscious of the solar system. That collective memory is then part of the galactic collective unconscious ... and so on in an ascending hierarchy of being.

Inside the individual species collective unconscious, in the diagram, we can see a smaller version of the diagram of an individual living system I had attached to the previous essay. This individual living system, itself, exists within the 'sphere' of its own collective unconscious ... along with all of the individual systems of its species.

So all of this is good and fine. But you might be asking yourself, why is understanding all of this of help to furthering my understanding of alchemy? I think it is necessary to explain the answer to this question here, just so that we don't loose focus.

When dealing with the laboratory process, most of us understand that confecting alchemical preparations from plants, from animal substances and from minerals and metals, is done specifically to perfect the substances of these materials so that ultimately they will serve as advanced esoteric medicines (for want of a better term). The way I usually refer to this fact is that no matter what kind of remedy the alchemist is trying to produce from his lab work, he is ultimately aiming at making quintessences of the substances he is working on. There are lesser quality alchemical preparations, that is true, but the summit of every alchemical operation on a substance is its quintessence. While it is fine to make a statement like that, or to accept (or even reject) this concept on an intellectual level, the practice of alchemy in the lab is a much more messy process, susceptible to error and eventually failure, if we don't actually know what it is that we are talking about. But if we actually understand what the substances are (alchemically speaking) that we are working on, and what natural laws and rules govern those materials, then we are more easily able to grasp what is possible and what is not possible when it comes to theory, and then practice ... thus saving us a lot of wasted time, effort and money.

So, as an example of where all of this information is leading us ... when the old alchemists speak of making quintessences, what they are talking about, in modern language (and the kind of language I have used in my descriptions, here), is that he is talking about extracting, concentrating and purifying a substance which is the 'physical vehicle' of the unconscious of the matter he is working on.

As the Emerald Tablet tells us ... 'as above, so below' ... or ... as in the 'mind', so in the binary level of reality. In other words, there is an intimate connection between the unity level of reality, and the binary level. When we manipulate the binary manifestation of a thing (like the rose bush), we are also manipulating its unity level. Think of the feed-back loop where binary existence is upgrading the memory storehouse with all the latest information about the plant. This upgrade happens because of the events the plant is exposed to in its life. If those experiences involve alchemical manipulation, that feed-back loop of information has an unusual effect on the memory storehouse of the plant, and the plant species.

But of more direct importance ... when the 'rubbish' is removed from the rose bush, alchemically, and its quintessence is thereby extracted, then concentrated, the 'perfection' that exists at the unconscious (1) level of the plant is now concentrated, too, in the resulting remedy. What we finally have is a substance extracted from a rose bush that has all the 'errors' that have crept in to its structure and function through its life removed ... and is now a perfect expression of its archetypal instruction. Because this Q-state substance is intimately linked with the unconscious of the rose bush, it also possesses the superior and governmental power the unconscious pattern possesses ... thereby overriding the lower and dysfunctional binary manifestation of itself.

But more on this later. For now, now that we have some idea of what happens to the living system once it is in our reality, and it is journeying through its life (and evolving along the way), next we need to look at the third stage of the process ... what happens when a living system has reached its use-by date and begins to decompose, and dies ...

[footnote: some reading:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rupert_Sheldrake]

ESSAY THREE

Death and Decomposition

While death is the end of the life cycle, it is the beginning of the alchemical process. For this reason, of the three prime stages of life (birth, life and death), death is of the foremost importance to the alchemist. It is so important, in the bigger scheme of things, that the author of 'The Glory of the World' (Hermetic Museum) had this to say about it ...

"...Then you may perform the putrefaction, or first coction, which turns our Stone quite black. By this sign you may know that you have the key to our Art." (Glory of the World)

The key to our Art. Death is so important because without understanding what it is, and mastering its mechanism, we can't even 'begin' the alchemical process.

During the stage of a living system's existence where its life is maintained, that stage is divided into two halves. One half begins at birth and ends at what is euphemistically called mid-life. During that first half of life the living system experiences an increase in its form (the size of its structure), and an increase in energy. Then at mid-life the form ceases to grow and the level of energy available to the system tapers off and levels out. The system has attained its peak physically and energetically. After a short period at the level, the physical and energetic Principals then begin to degrade, as the second half of life begins. Where the first half is characterised by an increase in energy and form, the second half is characterised by a decrease in energy and a slow degradation of form. The end of the second half of life comes when the physical and/or energetic level has degraded so much that the system can no longer remain integral, and death arrives.

So much is obvious from the simple observation of any living system.

While the path of the physical and energetic Principals is quite obvious, in the life cycle, the path of the third Principal is not always. In some living systems the mind Principal continues to increase in its development right through the second half of life until death manifests itself. In some living systems the evolution of the mind Principal stops its development even before the ascending form and energy of the first half of life is complete. In other living systems the mind Principal decays at some point during the second half of life, well before death is near. Just what happens with any specific individual living system where the mind Principal is concerned largely (but not entirely) depends on the 'esoteric maturity' of that system.

So, in alchemical terms, how do we define death? To answer that we should first be reminded of what 'life' is. Life, in the hermetic sense, is that state of existence which occurs where the three Principals (1) mind, (2) energy and (3) form, come together to create a living system. That is, life is not a substance in itself (as is often assumed by many occultists), but rather it is a 'condition'. A condition which arises when the three Principal parts that make a living system are brought together by nature as a living 'machine' (for want of a better term).

(note: when people speak of life as if it is itself a 'thing' like some substance, that can be captured or destroyed, they most often speak of it as either a kind of energy or of consciousness. But as alchemists we know energy is the Sulphur Principal, and consciousness is the Mercury Principal, and neither of these alone displays life or can manifest it.)

When considering what creates life, in this way, 'death' is a condition that occurs when the three Principals that define a living system, separate. That is, some kind of disease, accident or natural weakness of the system arises, which then causes a

situation where the three Principals can no longer stay locked together. They separate, and at that moment 'actual' death occurs. Once this happens, the living system can no longer be forced to 'live' again in its same coherence.

In a vastly distant past age alchemists paid a great deal of attention to the death process, and due to their predilection of working in a lab, they attempted to mimic death in vitro. The idea was that, for example, when they watched a plant die in nature they knew certain things were happening to the plant during that process which they couldn't grasp because of the natural conditions in open air death. So they hypothesized that if the plant was contained in a closed system (sic: in vitro), as it began to die, then everything that happened to the plant could be contained and analyzed.

Under the natural conditions of death when something dies the volatile portions of the living system evaporate and disappear into the air. But in vitro the evaporating portion is contained, and cannot escape into the atmosphere. So if we place a rosemary plant, (hypothetically) for example, in a large glass retort, and lute a receiving flask onto the retort spout, we create a closed system. As the plant dies, and decomposes (over a long period of time) we notice that the plant is separated (superficially) into two things ... the basic binary nature of the system. The first thing is - all of the volatile components of the plant, both gases and liquids. The second thing is composed of - all of the fixed (solid) parts of the plant (both minerals and heavy resins).

This same division happens in natural death as it does in death inside a closed system as I have explained. In alchemical philosophy we call the first kind of death natural, and the second kind (in vitro) philosophic, because it takes part inside a closed system, and all the parts of the plant which have decomposed (separated) have not been lost, but contained and

captured. Therefore this second kind of death is unnatural, a matter of art and science.

The next thing the old Adepts did was they took the evaporated (distilled) volatile portion of the binary, from the receiving flask, and they treated it on its own. They discovered that this volatile portion was not one thing, but two ... a clear liquid and a tintured oil. A binary within a binary. Then they took the solid part of the original binary out of the boiling flask and subjected that to further heat to see if it too could be divided again, and with enough heat they discovered that indeed the solid end of the original binary was itself a binary within a binary, as it divided into a heavy stinking oil which distilled, and left behind a mineral residue deposit.

Further experiment, with the tools they had available to them, showed that these substances could not be further divided, and thus they came to understand that upon death living systems separated into three 'Principal' things: (1) a clear liquid, (2) a solid mineral, and (3) oil, part heavy and part volatile.

From this they concluded that at death all living systems separated into three Principal substances, which they have since called the three alchemical Principals, or the three Principal Elements of life. To the clear liquid Principal they attributed mind. To the oily coloured Principal they attributed energy. To the clear mineral substance they attributed form or structure. In more general esoteric language these are called (1) spirit(mind), (2) soul (energy)and (3) body (structure), respectively. And in Paracelsian language: Mercury (mind), Sulphur (energy) and Salt (structure).

In this way, by the use of exact alchemical (and scientific) analysis, we can see the entire mechanism can be weighed and measured, and each part is referred to by an exact name. It is

not an arbitrary system subject to guesswork, where anyone can make up any rules they like, and insist they are valid.

At death, the volatile portions (spirit and the volatile portion of the soul), disappear and hasten to the 'sky' or 'heaven'. But the fixed portion of the original binary falls to the earth and remains there as dust. There is an important metaphor there, and it becomes significant if we now remember the idea I have elsewhere presented that each of the three alchemic Principals, as we 'see' them physically, also has a non-physical aspect. This is a commonly understood factor about the 'chemical' side of the Principals, that they are simply vehicles for their non-physical side ... "as above, so below". So when a living system dies, and is decomposed, what happens to the physical vehicles of the Principals also happens to the non-physical side of them.

This is an extremely important concept, because, we could say, that the entire motive for the validity of lab alchemy rests on the idea that as we manipulate the physical Principals in our lab, we are also manipulating their non-physical components. Without this factor, we would be practicing nothing more than sterile chemistry. For, when the alchemist contains his living system inside a closed lab system, and he subjects that living system to death (putrefaction), and the processes which follow death, he has also enclosed the non-physical attributes of the Principals of that living system which themselves are also undergoing the death process.

From my entire discussion so far we you should be able to see two core ideas now: (1) that all things emerge from One thing (so while the binary is fact, it is also an illusion, for everything is in reality One thing adapted to its environment through the use of a binary mechanism), and (2) that the physical end of the binary is equally as important as the non-physical. One is not 'better' or 'more effective' or 'more important' than the other. Both, necessarily, work in concert with

each other ... "for the benefit of the One", because both spring directly from the 'One' state, and equally belong to that state. The One state would, thuswise, be incomplete or imbalanced if one side of the binary was undermined or missing.

This is where alchemy begins, and chemistry ends ... for those who know alchemy and care for the integrity of the three Principals of a living system, and their non-physical components. Modern science only (thusfar) recognises the Principals of matter (Salt) and energy (Sulphur), but does not yet understand enough about mind (Mercury) to recognise that all living systems are not composed simply of matter and energy, but also include mind ... intelligence ... information ... consciousness (to some degree). This is where alchemy differs from modern science, for the alchemist recognises that intelligence is a necessity, and ensures that it is not neglected in his experiments. Not simple the intelligence of the alchemist himself ... but of the intelligence of the matter in his flasks ... for all things are composed of energy, matter and mind.

Now that I have briefly explained how a living system is born into this reality, how it is maintained here, and how it dies ... I can continue with our subject proper, alchemy. For as I have said alchemy begins where life ends, for the purpose of maintaining life and exalting it ...

ESSAY FOUR

Defining Alchemy

So now to alchemy proper.

Here, let me define what I mean by alchemy, because so many people jump in to an attempt at discussion of the subject of alchemy, without being taking care that so many diverse beliefs about the subject are had by different people, and on the assumption that all (or most) students of alchemy see the subject in generally the same way. This, of course, is not the case, which I discovered, much to my frustration and embarrassment, when the internet first became accessible to the public and I came online in the mid-to-late 90's. It never occurred to me that the people I had studied and discussed alchemy with, before the internet, generally agreed, in their view of the subject, largely because we had all studied under the same teacher, or in the same school of thought, and that there were other views out there that I had never been exposed to.

But once I started talking with a wide variety of students of alchemy from all over the world, I learned that there were many extreme views on the subject. Some people had a very classic view, and you could tell they had been trained by someone who was themselves a student of some classic system. Some people were very new age and seemed to have not the slightest idea about what alchemy really was, but insisted that their view was just as valid as anyone else's. Many people believed only in a psychological interpretation of the subject, often based on some neo-Jungian view of alchemy, and often insisted the lab tradition was completely fake, or a gross misunderstanding. (While that approach to alchemy is less common now than it once was, due to the overwhelming evidence of the validity of the lab tradition, there are still a number of people who cling to the 'psychology-only' interpretation of alchemy). Then there are

also occultists in general, involved primarily in other esoteric practices such as magic or mysticism, who come to alchemy with the intention of having it augment their other primary focus, and who also see alchemy through the lens of the ideas associated with that other system. Some came to alchemy from a background in chemistry or physics, and believed that these sciences alone could solve the alchemical enigma, if indeed there was a solution. Such people often have no esoteric background, no formal training in alchemy, and are strongly opposed to any idea that there is a 'valid' spiritual aspect to the tradition. Then, recently, we have had those people who are part of the ORMES movement make claim to being involved in alchemy, some of whom interpret both the lab tradition and its spiritual counterpart in ways that have never before been part of the classic tradition. And of course, last but not least, there are always novices, who are enthusiastic, but have little technical depth, often little lab experience, and have picked up all manner of erroneous ideas from all kinds of questionable sources (quite unintentionally).

So when talking with anyone on the subject of alchemy, we could be talking with someone who sees the subject from any of the above views, or other views I have not mentioned, and who, because of their personal bias, is going to carry with them many misunderstandings, personal interpretations and varying motives for being involved in the study of alchemy. All of us, to some degree, suffer from these afflictions, whether we like to admit it or not - which makes discussing alchemy complicated, often messy, and often argumentative.

With this situation being understood, a productive discussion of the subject of alchemy can really not begin until both parties understand where each other is coming from, and then agree, to some extent, on a common ground of definition and terminology. So with this in mind, and with the understanding that I am going to be talking a lot here, it is mete that before I start talking about strictly alchemical matters (especially of a

technical nature), that I define, firstly, what I mean by 'alchemy'. In this way you should be able to see how I see things, rather than assuming (without being aware of it) that my view might be the same as your own ... because chances are, at some point in this discussion that is definitely not going to be the case.

I should also point out that in my attempt at defining my view of alchemy, I am not trying to insist that my view is correct, and that anyone else's, if it diverges from my own understanding, must therefore be wrong. If at times, because of the way I have learned to talk about alchemy, I seem overly insistent, it is simply because of the degree of confidence I have in the accuracy of the ideas I am conveying ... based on my personal philosophy that it is unwise to talk about things which I myself cannot prove to be correct. I am a strong and vocal proponent of the belief that I am more than happy for anyone to accept or reject my views. It doesn't bother me in the least, and am always happy to listen with care to anyone who holds beliefs that are different from my own. Therefore, in discussing my interpretation of alchemical ideas what I am trying to do is articulate, as clearly and simply as I can, my knowledge, based on my experience. After all that is all any of us can really do. Draw a picture for someone else of where our understanding is, at any point in time. An understanding of which, we should accept, could change at any point in time because of new and compelling evidence (or a compelling argument). With this thought in mind my motive for bothering to go to the effort of explaining my view of alchemy is based on what is for me a very important concept ... that when any of us are struggling to come to grips with alchemy, we are, to a larger extent, forced to work many things out ourselves, in private, in our own minds. This, because the larger proportion of people who display an interest in studying alchemy will only discuss the subject (in public), within a very narrow band of commonly accepted opinion and experience. If we look at other forums founded for the purpose of discussing 'all and every aspect of alchemy', the truth is only a very small range of information is actually ever

broached, compared to the actual depth of the subject. Any of us who are reasonably familiar with the 'actual' range of ideas, which fall under the subject of alchemy, can quite easily see that there are many things about which most students of alchemy will simply never talk about publicly, or which, if brought up for discussion, are known to be done so at risk of invoking a shower of aggressive opposition. I, on the other hand, insist that an open discussion of all aspects of alchemy (and personal views) is the only healthy approach to forming a productive 'world view' of alchemy. That, in order to form a productive understanding of alchemy a number of ideas must be assimilated into one's view of the subject, so that that view can be anywhere a near complete one ... and because many of these ideas are 'prohibited' as subjects for what passes today as polite conversation about alchemy, a good number of students of the subject, and almost all novices to the task, have little or no grasp of these important and less well known concepts. So it is of a good deal of importance to me to provide an environment where these less well known concepts can be brought out into the open, talked about productively, in such a way that a wider group of students are in a position to develop a vastly more indepth personal view of alchemy. This goes a long way, I believe, to encouraging the natural death of the many erroneous, and blatantly silly, ideas that are allowed to proliferate in popular circles of alchemical discussion. At the same time, while making an attempt at discussing these more sensitive ideas about alchemy, mistakes are going to be made, simply because few of us have any reliable experience with thinking along these technical lines. In making that clear nobody should be afraid of making mistakes in the way they understand some of these concepts. That simply is unavoidable. But together with accepting we will make mistakes we also must accept that we will need to change some of our views as other people present ideas which, if we are to be honest, may be better than ones we presently hold ourselves.

I hale from the school of thought, within the realm of alchemical thought, that insists that after all is said and done, amongst all the diversity of opinion, knowledge and practice, alchemy itself, at the heart of its existence, is a theory, philosophy, teaching, learning and practice about One single process or mechanism that exists in nature. For me this idea was most effectively embodied in a well known saying by the Arabian alchemist Jabir, who said something along the lines of:

"Our matter is one, our vessel is one, and our work is one; to which we add not any extraneous thing, nor remove we ought; except that in preparation we take away superfluities."
[my paraphrase]

We are talking about a single process, which in its simplest form could be carried out in a single flask. A process which mimics the same laws and mechanism in nature itself.

This being the case, all of the many and various experiments, recipes, techniques, substances, equipment and products which can be seen to be included under the banner of the alchemical art, are all aspects of, or adaptations upon, One single work. Literally.

This single process or work is what Paracelsus called "spagyria" (the science of separating and then of binding the Elements). This technical term is an abridged description of the formula that explains what that single process or work is ... to take a substance, to reduce it to its chaos, to separate the Elements from that chaos, to purify the separate Elements, and then to recombine those purified Elements into One homogeneous substance. To SEPARATE, to PURIFY and to RECOMBINE. This is the spagyric method, the method that defines what alchemy is. Not just any old kind of separation, purification and recombination, but a specific type of each process, carried out in a specific way, in a specific order, with a specific goal.

In this way alchemy is man's attempt at mimicking the spagyric mechanism of nature, in his laboratory.

The purpose of the spagyric mechanism, both in nature and in the lab, is to take crude natural substances, which by their nature are dysfunctional (see my previous re3marks on the dysfunctional nature of binary reality), to remove their dysfunction(s), and to thus produce a perfect expression of that substance. Anything else that the alchemist might be concerned with, in relation to his alchemy, is always secondary to this prime purpose. This is the core theme that runs through all of alchemy.

For the esoteric alchemist (one who has a higher goal, of a spiritual nature), his prime concern with the removal of dysfunction and the perfection of things, always, before anything else, begins with gaining UNDERSTANDING about the nature of dysfunction, and the nature of the perfection of systems, carried out with the foremost intent of more effectively removing his 'own' dysfunctions, and of perfecting himself ... alchemically.

The esoteric alchemist studies and practices laboratory alchemy only because laboratory alchemy offers him the most accurate model through which he can understand himself and his reality, better. In this way lab alchemy is like a microscope, which allows us to see reality in finer detail and to bring it into sharper focus.

As I have described my definition of alchemy thusfar we should be able to see that alchemy is an attempt at reproducing a specific function in nature, under laboratory conditions. But alchemy is more than this, too. Nature has only carried out the process of alchemy to a point which is not the ultimate conclusion of the work. But the expert alchemist, through his knowledge and skill, can take substances from nature, which

have not as yet reached the end-point of alchemical evolution, and push them to that final goal, now. That goal is that which I call the Q-state ... the quintessence or the development of the 5th Element. So, not only is alchemy a work that is focused on one specific process of nature, but it is also a process which has one specific goal, the production of the Q-state. In other words, when considering the reality which we live in, and all of the people we deal with in our environment, what we are witnessing, as part of our life experience, is a world, and its inhabitants, all evolving toward the Q-state. The alchemist comes to this conclusion not only through his lab work, which he recognises is a microcosmic model of the larger reality, but also through his own internal alchemical process, which he recognises everyone around him is also undergoing ... the only difference in his case being that he is farther along the path than almost everyone else he knows, and is moving more swiftly, because he is consciously and therefore deliberately helping nature achieve its goal in his own life.

So is alchemy really an esoteric practice which is designed to make medicines with magical properties, as most occultists would probably see the situation? The answer is yes, but with a further defining characteristic. That these magical remedies have the inherent function of affecting the person who ingests them in such a way as to re-align them with nature's purpose. To realign them with nature's alchemical journey. A properly produced and fully functional alchemical preparation which has the effect of curing kidney problems, for example, will not just heal the kidneys. Because it has a Holistic effect, it will also alter other systems in your body and your mind. The upshot of which is that the outcome of the healing process is more well rounded, broader and more in depth than would be expected from any conventional remedy. In this way all properly produced and fully functioning alchemical remedies have one property in common, and that is that they all have a natural inherent attraction to the the state of unity that exists at the core of what we are. Because of this factor, when we ingest such

preparations, we will, to some degree or other, depending somewhat on our personal level of spiritual maturity (for want of a better phrase), be pulled along with the effect of the remedy toward the unity state, to some degree.

Therefore, if you are studying alchemy (on an intellectual level) and you are not grasping revolutionary revelations about the alchemical process and the unity state, to some degree, vividly, then you are not studying alchemy properly. If you are involved in lab alchemy and you are not grasping deep revelations about the lab processes relationship to the unity state, to some degree, vividly, then you are not practicing alchemy properly. If you are ingesting the products of your alchemical work, and you are not experiencing some aspect of this unity state to some degree, vividly, through that ingestion, then you have not confectioned your preparation properly. When alchemy is 'happening', the unity state always accompanies that event intimately, to some degree. Because alchemy is the mechanism of evolving things to a higher state, when we listen to an expert talk alchemically, or we study, practice or ingest some aspect of alchemy, we must also be connecting with the journey to unity. We experience a revelatory effect, and feel a change happening physically, mentally or emotionally, to some degree. If that effect is missing, then the process you are involved with is not alchemy ... you just believe it is, or have been conned in to believing it is.

For a process to be considered 'alchemy', no matter to what level of activity we are applying that process, then it must be based on alchemical laws that are laid down by nature. This factor is not negotiable. We cannot perform whatever techniques we like and then label them as alchemical, if we want to be taken seriously, and to attain alchemical results, unless those techniques conform with nature's alchemical method. In the same way, because nature's alchemical method ... her alchemical mechanism ... is universally present everywhere in nature, the same rules for the alchemical

process exist in the physical (such as in the lab), as they do in the non-physical (the mind). So, for example, any process which claims to be a spiritual technique for self-development (in conformity with nature) must also be an alchemical process. If we are to practice a method to evolve ourselves, and to unfold our latent potential, that process must by its very nature BE alchemical. In the same way, if the process we are practicing to attain an advanced spiritual development is not having quick and blatantly obvious effect, then it isn't working ... it isn't alchemical. When applied alchemy is in effect, that effect is not a long slow process of manifesting results. When the philosopher's stone is projected upon molten metal, to effect a transmutation, that transmutation doesn't take a lifetime to complete its effect. It is virtually immediate. When an alchemist ingests the elixir vitae, for the purpose of accomplishing rejuvenation, that effect does not take a lifetime, it is virtually immediate. This is the whole modus operandi of alchemy, that when it is working its effects are fast and powerful, to the extreme ... (except in nature, at macrocosmic levels, where the effect is slow).

To use a common analogy ... if we plant a healthy seed in soil, with the right degree of warmth and moisture, that seed will not take a lifetime to germinate. Under those proper conditions nature's laws of seed germination spring into effect immediately, and we see the results within days ... and day-by-day for that plant's entire growth cycle we can see and track the stages of its development. Likewise, because spiritual development ... the process of initiation, which leads to Illumination, is a natural process, just like the germination and growth of a seed ... when the initiate finds himself being initiated under the correct conditions, which nature herself demands for initiatory development, then the process is immediate, the effect recognizable and undeniable, and the stages of development predictable and obvious.

If this is not the case, then alchemy is not 'happening' ... no matter what you like to believe. There is no ... "I am doing alchemy" ... if there is no alchemical effect. Remembering that alchemy is not simply an intellectual concept. The word itself is a verb. To say ... "I am an alchemist" ... is like saying ... "I am a mountaineer" ... it is something that springs from an action, and simply reading about alchemy does not an alchemist, make ... any more than reading about fish, a fisherman makes. Even to the extent that having lab glassware, a lab, and a collection of metallic ores, and performing lab work from alleged alchemic recipes does not make someone an alchemist. To be an alchemist one must be working 'alchemy' (specific techniques with specific results) ... some reflection of nature's alchemical process. In this way the average gardener, baker or wine maker has a closer relationship with nature's alchemy than do most people who privately or publicly claim the title 'alchemist'.

ESSAY FIVE

The History of Alchemy

An important part of defining what we believe alchemy is, is our view of its history. What we believe something is today depends a lot on what we believe it was yesterday. In the same way, a lot of misconceptions we have about a thing today arise from erroneous deductions we make about things that happened before today. So we can believe all manner of things about alchemy if we have no real idea about its history, or we confect a history of our own to fit the views we want to have today.

With this in mind this essay is probably going to contain ideas which some people will find the easiest to reject. Thats fine with me, and in fact I suggest if the general theme of this essay just doesn't do it for you, then ignore it :)

What I refer to generally as the middle section of alchemical history stems from the time of the Arab alchemist Jabir, down to the time of Robert Boyle and the foundation of the Royal Society. Anyone who has bothered to study the history of alchemy during this period can easily get a pretty accurate view of what went on in this period of time. Its no mystery. But before Jabir's time very little is known about alchemy, and that is the period of time I am most interested in, and will talk about here, because I believe that this early ... ancient ... period is that which gave alchemy its defining characteristics.

While we know virtually nothing about the lab tradition before Zisimos of Panopolis (?AD), few people who care would argue that there was no lab tradition before his time. We know Zisimos inherited a well developed and healthy system, and it is generally accepted that tradition stretches back before the dawn of the Christian era into the Middle East. Few people

would also argue that where recorded history is concerned it is quite possible that alchemy in general, and the lab tradition along with that, probably had its origin in ancient Egypt and was known and practiced in ancient Mesopotamia. Comparatively little is known about what the ancient Mesopotamians might have known about alchemy, but we do know they had developed concepts about substances that could be ingested that would bestow extended longevity and heightened mental power. But we could guess at what they might have known by looking at Egypt, which has given up a lot more information about the subject, and which culture we know had major exchanges of knowledge and technology with Mesopotamia.

When looking at what we can know about ancient Egypt's knowledge of alchemy, no record has survived of the lab tradition from that culture. Claims are made in the academic community about certain chemical-style papyri that have survived, but anyone who knows anything accurate about the lab tradition knows these papyrus 'recipes' are largely chemical, medicinal (non-chemical) and cosmetic. Many of them describe processes for faking precious gems and metals, and a good portion of the academic community who concern themselves with this information believe this is what constitutes early alchemy ... attempts at faking precious metals and gems, and that later alchemy (spiritual and practical) grew out of this fakery.

But Egypt has preserved a lot of information about philosophic and psycho-spiritual alchemy. A lot of that information is presented in an extremely symbolic and cryptic form, but today we are gaining a lot of understanding, gradually, about this aspect of alchemy.

I might be said that the central focus around which ancient Egyptian religio-spiritual beliefs revolved was the King cult. The deepest, most serious and esoteric knowledge that the ancient Egyptians had about personal spiritual transformation was tied

up in, and secreted in, the Cult of the King as the incarnation of the god Horus. The technical ability for the High Priests to transform the King in his afterlife state, into Osiris risen, and for the King's soul to migrate to the star Sirius where he would abide immortally, was the focus of the spiritual technology of the ancient Egyptians. As a process of death and resurrection and transformation the King ritual would have naturally been designed in accordance with alchemical law. We can get a feeling for something how the Egyptians saw this alchemical transformation by studying the book of the duat, which is painted in stark relief on the walls of the sarcophagus chamber of the tomb of Thutmose III, who died circa 3000 years ago. While the details of how much the Egyptians understood about this process still elude us, we can easily make out the broad outlines, and many ideas and symbols we recognise from medieval alchemy can be found 2000 years earlier on the walls of that tomb.

At the same time there are other aspects of ancient Egyptian culture that are now relatively well accepted that allow us a glimpse at how deep the secret tradition in ancient times ran. For example, we know that the ruling elite in ancient Egypt conceived of a stupendous plan that would take centuries to carry out, of symbolically mapping the major constellations they were interested in in monuments on the ground. In the curious book 'The Orion Mystery' the authors describe how they re-discovered the fact that the three major pyramids on the Giza plateau were exact symbolic replicas of the three stars in Orion's belt, and that a number of other pyramids mimicked other key stars in nearby constellations. That in line with this plan the three main pyramids at Giza were orientated toward the Nile river at the same angle and position that the stars in the belt of Orion have in relation to the Milky Way. In this way the major monuments of ancient Egypt were a reflection of a certain area of the night sky, making 'below' (here on earth) a reflection of 'above' (the heavens). The book *The Orion Mystery*, ends there,

though. But the real depth of the story runs much further. Paracelsus, in his book on Hermetic Astronomy tells us that ..

(quote)

... by which we should understand that the ancient recognised a relationship between the physical stars in the night sky, and the structure and function of the mind. Paracelsus was telling us that in this view of things the night sky is seen, in Hermetic terms, as a reflection of the mind, in the physical world. This plan also formed part of the Egyptian scheme of esoteric knowledge, because we know that the Egyptian concept of the mind, which they called the 'Duat', was spoken of as a reflection of the night sky. So in the Egyptian scheme of esoteric knowledge, their Hermetic system, they recognised an intimate relationship between physical existence, astronomical existence, and the mind, and saw the three levels as operating in concert. In other words, these three systems were each part of a larger whole. A larger universal One. Three aspects of a One reality, moving and evolving in tangent.

If alchemy is, as I have explained previously, the study and practice of a universal mechanism that underlies the very structure and function of our reality, then if we consider the share scale and depth of the schema of the ancient Egyptian's esoteric knowledge, we might also accept that the degree of observation of the nature of reality that they were engaged in would have allowed them not only to recognise the properties of the alchemical function in every day life, at a cosmic level, and in the mind, but at a vastly greater depth than we presently have a grasp on today.

If this scenario we see described in The Orion Mystery is valid, expanded upon by the idea I have described where the Egyptian plan of the mind was the third facet of that body of knowledge ... then considered in relation to the kind of information John Anthony West presents in his 'Serpent in the

Sky' and his 'Magical Egypt' DVD series, which move forward from the starting point made in The Orion Mystery ... then we might begin to gain some insight in to the richness of the system of esoteric knowledge the esoteric elite of ancient Egypt were partly to. Then if we can accept that a part of this body of knowledge must have included a view of the alchemical mechanism in nature, we also might begin to grasp the scale of the kind of serious understanding the Egyptians had concerning alchemical knowledge, on more than one level. It certainly makes our present attempts at understanding alchemy look relatively pathetic in comparison.

ESSAY SIX

A Closer look at the Spagyric Process

In my last essay I defined alchemy as being the study and application of the spagyric process. Now, in order to understand in more depth just what alchemy is, it will be necessary to understand in more detail just what the spagyric process is. So with everything I have explained up until this point we are now in a position to grasp a detailed explanation of this concept.

The old alchemists learned most of what they understood about alchemy from the observation of nature's process. They explained this fact frequently in statements such as ... "follow in nature's footsteps". For years I thought about this aspect of their work but couldn't really grasp exactly what it was that they were pointing at. What was it in nature that they were observing, and from that observation gathering together the body of knowledge we now call alchemy? In a good number of books of old texts on alchemy, where descriptions of natural processes are provided as examples of how alchemy operates in nature, those descriptions are often about how metals form in the earth. This is a common theme. Also it is not infrequent to see explanations of animal reproduction and basic horticulture as analogies of nature's alchemical mechanisms. But the kinds of descriptions that are given are highly symbolic, vague, incomplete (when it comes to looking for a complete picture of the alchemical process) ... and to be honest, from what we know today about natural science, the old alchemist's view of geological chemistry and physics, botany and biology are full of technical errors.

Eventually, after reading the Golden Chain of Homer one day, I realised that the place in nature that offered the clearest explanation of nature's alchemical mechanism, and the one most easily observed by anyone, and open to testing by the

student alchemist, was what I might call ... the planet's macrocosmic chemical circulatory. That which modern science calls ... the cycle of precipitation. Any student of the lab tradition, of a rainy Sunday, when working in their lab keeping vigil over a distillation, while standing at the window watching the streaks of rain dripping down the window pane, can't help recognising a correspondence between what is happening in their flasks and what is happening outside in their immediate environment.

A little more contemplation on this concept and its not hard to see that our entire planet, when viewed in the bigger picture, when considered (al)-chemically, is just a larger model of a pelican or circulatory vessel. At the centre of this enclosed system is a huge mass of 'matter', composed of animal, vegetable and mineral substances. A relatively huge volume of liquid is constantly circulating within the vessel, being distilled by the heat of the sun and by heat welling up from the centre of the earth, condensing in the atmosphere, and returning to the earth, where it soaks in to everything, washes everything, and macerates all matter laying on and in the earth's surface. Exactly the same mechanism is operating inside the alchemist's pelican (circulatory vessel), and we know from a long and careful study of alchemy that circulation is one of the 'key' techniques of the alchemical process.

At the same time, as students of nature's process, we can take samples of earth, plant matter, animal matter, of sea water, river water, the water of lakes and rain water, and alchemically analyse them to discover what is going on 'out there' in nature, and what kinds of substances (alchemically speaking) are hidden in these various pieces of the planet's circulatory mechanism. In this way, if we know what we are doing, we can build up a picture of under what kinds of conditions the planet's macrocosmic al-chemistry began, what state it is in now, and where it is heading to in the future. Not only this but we can mimic this macrocosmic process microcosmically inside the

flasks in our lab ... while at the same time tweaking the process so that we can perform it more efficiently, more economically, and more quickly than it is working outside in nature.

The kind of results we would come up with, after a long period of research, is the kind of knowledge we see described in *The Golden Chain of Homer*. That text is, largely, a description of the alchemical mechanism that can be seen and investigated in nature, through the large-scale circulatory of the planet's chemical eco-system.

Now, either over an very long period of this kind of investigation, in the early history of alchemy (when the basic rules of the game were being defined and laid down), or through our having inherited an accurate explanation of this body of knowledge by someone who already knew it, the fundamental doctrine of alchemy was formulated. That is, from observing and analysing nature's macrocosmic circulatory, the old alchemists started to recognise that there was a simple but highly effect 'mechanism' working within this process. The more they studied this mechanism the more obvious it became that it was not only present in the planet's precipitation cycle, but that it was a universal mechanism, to be found in every department of nature, and in every living system. This is the mechanism which was originally conceived of as al-chemy ... God's chemistry ... and of which Paracelsus coined the term ... spagyria ... to emphasize the nature of its process.

When the spagyric mechanism was first recognised, and all the extraneous pieces of natural process were removed from it, leaving us with just a raw and simple picture of what was happening in that mechanism, the following formula was established:

In its most simple form it was understood that spagyrics involved a SEPARATION of a living systems integrated clockwork into four fundamental 'conditions', which were called

the alchemical ELEMENTS ... or the basic Elements of the spagyric mechanism. These Elements, once separate, were then PURIFIED. That is, everything which was not strictly part of the pure Element was removed from it. Then the three PRINCIPAL Elements, once clean, were RECOMBINED back into a homogeneous living unit, which could thereafter no longer be separated back into its constituent Elemental parts.

This of course is a highly simplified view of the spagyric mechanism. But it is nevertheless a valid view, because when we look at the planetary circulatory system from an alchemical point-of-view, we can see that each stage of the spagyric process is happening constantly, all at the same time, just in the way the basic formula describes. (See attached diagram - earth's ROTA.jpg).

Nevertheless, as alchemists studied this basic rotary process, and closely looked at what was happening at each of its stages, they developed ways of improving on the mechanism. This is what is meant by the phrase that ... "art improves where nature has left off" [my paraphrase] ... which is often repeated by alchemical writers. The alchemist has taken what nature has to offer, and has tweaked her process 'artfully' to improve upon it. So we can imagine, somewhat analogically, that during his working of the circulatory process, the alchemist can stop it at certain points, remove pieces of the mechanism and tweak them by more efficient methods, place the pieces back in the mechanism, and restart the process. By this means he can greatly speed up the work. From centuries of alchemical research we have therefore developed the spagyric mechanism from a basic circulatory to include all manner of dissolutions, using many and various solvents, calcinations, imbibitions, sublimations, desiccations, deliquescences, etc, etc. In this manner, for example, a salt which may take years to dissolve in a liquid by simple circulation, can be dissolved in minutes if it is removed from the circulatory and volatized by some technique, then replaced back in the pelican - and so on.

From the basic spagyric process, further steps in the mechanism were also discovered or added, to improve on the overall technique. For example, it was discovered that the entire work moves along far more effectively, and the outcome is far more potent, if first the crude matter which is taken in hand to begin the work is first retrograded (reverse engineered), back to its proto-state .. its 'CHAOS', and then the Elements of the substance SEPARATED from that chaos. Then at the end of the process, once the Q-STATE had been established, and the matter was again homogeneous, it was discovered that the potency of the Q-state could be amplified by manipulating it in a special way. This further stage in the work was then called MULTIPLICATION ... of the effect of the quintessence. Then, finally, the ultimate final conclusion of the work was added, to round-off the process with its logical goal ... when the Q-state was added to a dysfunctional living system in order to rectify or heal that system, and raise it to its highest expression. This final stage of the process was labeled PROJECTION, and is the completion of the alchemist's Great Work.

It is not hard to imagine, then, that similar to the way in which ancient astronomers were watching the night sky, figuring out how to calculate the earth's rotation against the positions of the fixed stars, recognising that some of those stars moved, and in a strictly defined orbit, and to calculate the time it took the earth to rotate the sun once, and that the cycles of eclipses were predictable ... that the alchemists, themselves, were likewise watching the earth's al-chemical process, analysing and calculating its stages and developments, and coming to understand how spagrica was operating and unfolding all around them.

From the above description of the way in which the spagyric mechanism operates in nature, we might also find ourselves contemplating the way in which the ancient alchemists first understood the alchemical process, in a very simple operation.

In this way we should be able to strip away all of the complexity, confusion and error that is so much part of modern alchemical point-of-view, and get back to the simple, basic, root of the work ... and then from there retrace the old Adept's steps.

ESSAY SEVEN

The Quintessence

At the end of the spagyric process the desired outcome is a quintessence. It is important to understand exactly what a quintessence is because before we start our alchemical work. If we don't understand the goal, when we begin our alchemical work we might be more susceptible to making mistakes, or wondering off in to pointless avenues if we are unsure we we are supposed to be heading.

The word quintessence means 'fifth essence' and refers to the Fifth Alchemical Element. We should know that common knowledge in the study of Western Hermetism tells us that all things are composed of Four Elements, Earth, Water, Air and Fire. But we also should know that there is a Fifth Element, which is none of the other four, but is derived from them none-the-less. Therefore, if we know how the quintessence is derived from the other four elements, then we also know alchemy. We know its process.

So just to make a this point clearly ... the starting point in our consideration of what the quintessence is, and how that knowledge helps us understand the alchemical process, let me quote from Johann Isaac Hollandus. In his description of his first method of how to complete the alchemical plant work (Opus Vegetabile), Hollandus tells us:

"Now, put the four elements together and make of them a perfect corpus. Now the elements are again gathered and united with each other, joined and fixed. Now it is a perfect glorified body which lasts imperishably into eternity. If now all artists who were ever born or may yet be born, would come together, they could never again separate the elements from each other. Yes, all the devils in hell now have no power to do

that, neither anyone else but GOD alone. Only now may you say that you have the quintessence, which is indeed a gift of GOD."

Hollandus' statement contains ideas that are commonly held by the old Adepts, all of who agree unanimously on what the quintessence is. From what Hollandus tells us in this brief description we can summarise a number of things. First, that the quintessence arises from wedding the four elements. Secondly, that this binding of the four elements produces a 'perfect body', a pure solid substance. Thirdly, that this body is permanent. Fourthly, that once the four Elements are wedded in the right way, that makes a quintessence, they cannot again be separated. Fifthly, that this substance is the Fifth Element (quintessence).

So, working backwards from our knowledge of the end product of the alchemical process, to figure out how we reached that product, we know from this statement of Hollandus that if we want to make this powerful medicine, and quintessential substance, we need to know how to collect and then to bind the four elements in a way that they cannot again be separated. This might seem a slight matter, but when we attempt to obtain the four elements of a thing (a plant in this case), then join those elements together in a way that they cannot again be separated, it is no easy task. If we ever manage to discover how this is done, we will learn eventually that the old Adepts discovered only one way of achieving this goal ... and we call that method alchemy, or spagyria.

What they learned was that you can't bind the elements permanently unless you purify them each individually and completely. That you cannot do that until you first have separated and contained them. In this way, if you want to make the quintessence of a thing you first have to know how to separate and contain its elements. In order to be able to do that you first need to know how to tell what constitutes a thing's

elements. What is the earth of a thing? What is its water? How can you tell when you have the air of a thing? and what is its fire? Then how do you purify them once you have them? And, finally, when they are pure how do you bind them inseparably together? ... a thing few people understand, and fewer still have ever accomplished.

So what is the quintessence of a thing? The 'Fifth' element arises from the uniting of the other four. In this way the Fifth element is not any of the other four, but is a new element, one composed of the four. When they are wedded permanently those four elements no longer exist, but a new substance is created, a Fifth substance.

This quintessence, this Q-state, also exists in nature. The old alchemists discovered, from studying nature's process, that everywhere in nature quintessential substances can be found. But because nature works by a very slow process thus far she has only produced a small amount of the quintessence of things.

At the same time each species of thing has its own Q-state. This physical substance is the vehicle for the species Anima Mundi ... its 'memory'. In this way the non-physical side of a thing's Q-state substance contains a perfect blueprint of that species. It is this fact that makes the physical vehicle of the Q-state powerful ... and possess medicinal influence over the common individuals of its species (as well as other species). Paracelsus sometimes referred to this property of the Q-state, its non-physical power, as its 'arcana' (secret property), and he had the habit of referring to medicines that contained Q-state properties also as our arcana, or the arcana (most often used as a collective noun). Another term which he used to refer to Q-state medicines, was 'Magistry' (from medieval Latin: of the master), meaning the highest or 'master' medicines.

One of the most important properties of quintessences is that they possess the ability to 'transmute'. In biology and psychology that means rejuvenation. In metalurgy that means to push the evolution of a metal forward to its extreme limit. This is an important concept about quintessences, because all quintessences possess this property to some degree, it means that while a quintessence produced from a specific substance will cure specific illnesses, at the same time it will also cause some degree of rejuvenative effect. It is this aspect of applying alchemical remedies that sets them apart, and above, from all other types of medicine. It is this physical and mental effect which is the 'magical' property of alchemical remedies. Because if we removed this effect, in all its ramifications, from alchemical preparations, then the medicine would be no better than any other medicine that had the ability to cause a cure of a specific disease. For example, if we could produce an alchemical remedy for a headache, but not have the rejuvenative effect, that remedy would be no better than panadol. Therefore, why would we go to all the labourous effort of making an alchemical headache medicine when for little effort we could get a reliable remedy from the local supermarket? The reason why we bother to make the alchemical remedy is because of its Q-state effect ... the effect of rejuvenation.

When we consider this property of Q-state remedies we need to understand that such medicines are, then, not for conventional application. In reality these remedies have an esoteric initiatory effect. That is, alchemical medicines are initiatory agents, first and foremost. They are not designed for common use as pharmacological remedies, they are designed specifically for use by initiates.

Now that we have reached the point in my discussion of making this idea clear, the next thing we should consider is, just what initiation is.

ESSAY EIGHT

Initiation

Before I start discussing the idea of esoteric initiation, let's first go back over the main ideas I have put forward in my discussion so far.

The first idea of importance I have put forward was that alchemy is, at its core, all about a specific rotary process.

In the entire scope of the subject of alchemy all kinds of operations are toyed with and all kinds of products are sort after. But behind all of this, at the heart of what alchemy is all about, is a specific natural rotary process.

The next important idea I presented was that (given the first premise) the goal of this process is the production of quintessences.

That is, if we work this specific alchemical process properly, the thing we will always end up with is the quintessence of the thing we took in hand to begin the work with.

The third main idea I presented was that the key thing about the quintessence is that it is the highest expression of the thing it was taken from, and when ingested (or projected) it causes transmutation or rejuvenation, to some degree.

For me these ideas are the three backbone concepts about alchemy. They explain what alchemy is, and they provide the motive for its study and practice. If you have followed my discussion to this point and feel you have grasped the rationale of my argument so far (even if you don't necessarily agree with it), then it shouldn't be hard for you to make the next conceptual leap from the lab side of alchemy (which I have mainly

explained so far), to the psycho-spiritual facet of alchemy that I am now going to explain.

How I am going to deal with this is to first describe a system of esoteric psychology (an explanation of the structure and function of the mind). Then when that picture is relatively complete, I will explain how the structure and function of the mind relate to lab alchemy. In this way (I hope) you will begin to see how the old alchemists recognised how the machinery of the mind was almost the same as the mechanism of lab alchemy ... and thereby, how they learned to apply the laws that govern lab alchemy to the mind, in order to exalt and evolve the mind.

As a matter of record, before I begin, those of you who are aware of the series of books I am writing (The Hermes Paradigm series), the information I am now going to explain forms the main subject of the 5th and last book of the series. While that book is, as of this moment, still only very rough notes, a good deal of what you will now see me discuss is an example of what will appear in that 5th volume. As such, because that book has not as yet been written, most of what I will explain here about inner alchemy is my first attempt at putting these ideas in an orderly and relatively complete format, in writing. While this process forms the main subject of tuition of the Heredom Group, that tuition is based on instructions concerning the practical techniques which are based on the theory I am about to explain. In the Heredom Group tuition on this subject very little theory behind the practical process is explained to students, because once they have experienced the results of the practical inner work, the theory becomes self evident.

I think it is safe to say that discussion of the inner alchemical work is one of the most sensitive areas of alchemical study. This is because so little is actually known, historically, in the mainstream, about what those alchemists who were involved in

the inner work were really up to. So almost everyone who cares about this aspect of alchemy has their own very personal take on just what it is all about ... and because it is a very personal thing, people tend to get very precious about it. At the same time a very large percentage of the modern alchemical community don't accept this side of alchemy. They believe there is nothing valid in it, and that it stems from primitive superstition. So, often when anyone attempts to talk about inner alchemy in public forums, usually that kind of talk draws a lot of aggressive response. So much so that this is the first time in eighteen years of being online that I have attempted to talk about this subject, at any length, in public.

So lets see how that goes :)

Now, we are continuing on from the idea that if we ingest quintessences, to some degree they are going to have a rejuvenative effect on us. Part of the effect of rejuvenation is physical (bio-chemical), and part is psychological. When people ingest these substances for the first time they often get a surprise, because equally as often they previously knew nothing, or next to nothing, about this psychological effect. Then, if the quintessence is powerful enough, that psychological effect is not only going to be a surprise, its going to be a shock ... because while the remedy is cleaning out their body (rejuvenation), it is also going to be cleaning out their mind (psycho-therapeutically), as well as awakening psycho-physical effects that most occultists have only drempt about.

This psycho-therapeutic effect of quintessences is that which, traditionally, hermetists have referred to as 'initiation'. So in order to understand what these remedies will do to your mind, you need to understand, technically, just what initiation is.

The popular notion of the definition of initiation in the occult community rarely has anything to do with the reality. Many students of the occult believe that esoteric initiation is simply a

process of studying and learning occult knowledge, and probably also being involved in occult practices such as ritual, divination, astrology, etc. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

In order to know what real hermetic initiation is we need a basic understanding of esoteric (occult) psychology, which I will explain now in extremely simple, but accurate terms.

The average human being has a mind which is composed of two states of consciousness. One state is what we might call temporal consciousness, which contains all the lower and temporary functions of mind that make up the individual's personality. Everything that you recognise as 'you' (mentally) goes in that package, along with a bunch of stuff you are unaware of about yourself. The other end of the human mind is everything we might refer to as 'eternal', and this contains everything about you that is permanent (generally speaking). Also, inside your eternal consciousness resides what we can call the 'Higher Functions' of your mind (and I mean that in the esoteric sense, not the modern scientific sense), which (for want of a better term), is where your spiritual self resides. (See attached diagram).

When the average person is living their daily life they operate 99.999 percent from their lower (temporal) functions. All of the decisions they make and their ability to observe and judge the world, and communicate and relate to other people, all comes from their lower functions ... their personality. Much of what your personality is you have inherited from other people when you were very young. In other words your view of the world and your approach to dealing with the world is mostly learned behaviour. Or more accurately 'programmed' behaviour. Later in life we all add to this early learning ourselves, but what we add or reject from our world view is always tainted by our early childhood education (programming)

about life, which we inherit from other people (the people who raised us, primarily).

Rarely, in the average life, do we ever 'connect' with our Higher (eternal) Functions consciously ('the red path '7' in the diagram), and even when that does happen it is most often an accident, it rarely happens deliberately. Although if we get involved with esoteric training then it is more likely that connections with our Higher Functions will happen more often, and deliberately ... but even then usually those connections are still vague and temporary flashes of experience.

The important thing to understand about the Higher Functions is that when we form a connection with them that we then have the ability to 'think' outside the 'average' box. We have the ability to recognise and to understand ideas and situations that exist outside of common human mental ability. When I say 'common' I mean the full range of human experience from mentally impaired cognition (including childhood cognition) all the way up to high IQ individuals.

This is a simplified way of explaining this idea, but it is accurate.

Now, the thing to understand about the Higher Functions is that the ability to grasp and to actually understand things like alchemy comes from the Higher Functions. This is because alchemy itself is a Higher Function process. For example, all of the ideas I have explained about alchemy so far, here, are an example (in a very crude form) of how the Higher Functions 'think' about alchemy. So, for example, if you made a connection with your Higher Functions and started dwelling on the subject of alchemy, ideas will start flowing into your conscious awareness that look very similar to the ideas I have discussed thusfar ... and 'pictures' of concepts like those I have presented in the diagrams I have also posted will also be seen

clearly in your mind's eye as graphic examples of alchemical concepts.

In this way we can say that the people who first recognised the knowledge of alchemy were people who had this connection with the Higher Functions. They were either born with that connection intact, or they developed the ability during their lives. In other words, the early Adepts of the hermetic tradition realised that most people don't have this link to the Higher Functions, but that it can be encouraged to develop by practicing special mental techniques. Then when someone develops this link (7) and gains the ability to peek into the Higher Functions of their mind, one of the things they will see there is the alchemical mechanism, that lies behind manifest nature, moving and rotating like a clockwork mechanism (metaphorically speaking).

The practice of teaching these techniques of accessing the Higher Functions to someone who does not possess that conscious link naturally is what constitutes real hermetic initiation. And the old Adepts taught that alchemy (for example) cannot be properly 'undersood' until that link was established, because in order to be able to 'think' accurately about alchemy you needed to 'think' with the Higher Functions, because the normal thinking mind, the lower functions, are incapable to grasping the weird nature of alchemy.

To attempt to picture what an experience of the Higher Functions might be like, imagine that on the side of your head you had a switch that could turn on or off your ability to experience emotion. But that you are unaware the switch exists. You live your life normally until well into your adult life, experiencing the full range of human emotions. Then suddenly one day someone comes along and flicks that switch, and your emotions shut down. I think most people could kind of imagine how that might be.

Emotion is one of the faculties of the mind. So are the Higher Functions. But most people never get to consciously experience the Higher Functions ... nevertheless when you practice techniques to 'turn on' your Higher Functions, it is like someone coming back in to your life after a few years of having your emotion switch turned off, and switching them back on. The sensation is not foreign ... but you definitely feel like something which is part of the mind machine, which you have not been experiencing, has (almost) suddenly become active after having been dormant, and that the reactivation of that function adds a new dimension of experience to the functioning of your mind.

If you had of been born with your emotion switch turned off ... then when other people talked about emotion to you, you are not really going to have any real idea what they mean. You might even be tempted to suggest that they are deluded, especially if you lived in a world where 99.999 percent of people lived all their lives with their emotion switch turned off. But once that switch was activated, you would suddenly become aware that an entire range of mental function that you once were totally ignorant of, now becomes as real for you as the ability to 'think' is for most of us.

This is what it is like to be initiated, and by that process have your Higher Functions turned on. Because so few people are in that situation, if you tried to explain it to them ... and how useful it is, they would have no frame of reference, and possibly think you're a bit of a nut.

To make this idea a little clearer, it is possible, for example, for a Master alchemist to teach a novice student how to make the Philosopher's stone, even if that novice does not have that Higher Link established in his mind. The novice will see each process worked and duplicate what his Master shows him, and could make the Stone perfectly in this way. But ... in having done so he would not be capable of understanding what the

Stone really is, or how it does what it does, or, more importantly ... what the fact that the Stone can be made really means in the bigger picture.

In the same way, a student of alchemy without that link, and without a teacher who has that link, cannot solve the mysteries of alchemy because he doesn't possess the 'Higher Thinking' ability of the Higher Functions. This is why so many people who come to study alchemy never succeed in reaching its ultimate goals. Even if they are highly intelligent (academically speaking), and have a good university education in chemistry and physics, alchemy would still look like foolishness to them, or its secrets would evade them. Because even though they have the pieces of knowledge at their finger tips that could allow them success, they don't know how to use that knowledge to understand alchemy. It would be like owning a Ferrari, but having no idea how to drive a car.

So the old Adepts, who knew their stuff, always repeated ... in order to succeed in alchemy you need to either be taught by an expert (someone with the link to the Higher Mind, or who was trained by someone who had that link), or alternatively to receive it by divine revelation. What they meant by these two things was that if you are taught by an expert (an Adept) then one of the first things he will do is open that link in your own mind, so you can then grasp the truth about alchemy yourself. By 'divine revelation' they meant ... of course ... that you have that link opened for you, some how, without the aid of a teacher. But in a situation that is very rare by normal means (being taught by an expert), having that link opened by other means is even rarer.

So the old hermetic Masters always insisted that before alchemy (or magic) could be studied successfully, the student first had to be 'initiated' ... and this meant, have his link to the Higher Functions opened, by someone who knows how that is done, because he himself has had it done to him.

Now, here is the clincher. As I mentioned before, the thing we know about the quintessence is that it can rejuvenate (to varying degrees), and that rejuvenation also includes having a psycho-spiritual impact. I have also called that effect 'initiatory' ... and by that I specifically meant that if you ingest a powerful enough alchemical quintessence, it will manipulate your mind in such a way as to open the link between your lower functions and your Higher Functions.

That, ultimately, is the sole motive for practicing alchemy, whether it is lab alchemy or inner alchemy ... the end result, at the extreme end of the journey, is the same for both approaches. All roads lead to Rome, as they say.

I might add (again) that I don't speak from theory here. I know these ideas are fact, and I know how they are accomplished. That is, they are provable, and reliably repeatably, in the scientific definition of reliable and repeatable.

So, how is the mind structured, actually? and how does it function? that then makes all of this possible? ...

ESSAY NINE

The Six Functions of Mind

In previous times the alchemists who were not simply interested in the chemical (lab) side of alchemy, but who were initiates focused on personal, spiritual development, very likely studied Qabala as the source of theory concerning inner or psycho-spiritual alchemy.

I might base this claim on two ideas, about Qabala, that are relatively well known. First, that Qabala itself is a very alchemical philosophy. For example, if we read MacGregor Mathers 'Qabala Unveiled', which is a commentary on the respected Qabalistic text the Sepher Ha Zohar, we can see in a couple of places where Mathers points out the comparison between Qabalistic ideas and alchemy. Secondly, it is also well known that the Bible was originally written by men who were by their nature trained Qabalists. So the Bible is known to be full of Qabalistic ciphers and ideas. At the same time most people who have studied alchemy know the Bible is full of allusions to alchemical concepts, and we also know that for a long period of history the Hebrews possessed a well developed and healthy alchemical tradition. So there is a lot of cross fertilization between classic Hebrew Qabala and alchemical thought and practice.

I should point out, though, that today most Western students of the occult, who study Qabala as a normal part of an interest in 'high magic', have very much been trained to think of Qabala as largely a magical system. So the idea that it is centrally alchemical might be very new to a lot of people, even if they don't entirely doubt the idea that Qabala contains alchemical concepts.

Now, it is my belief (based on my experience) that the main reason why the old alchemists turned to Qabala as the main source of information that was of help to them in studying and practicing inner alchemy, was because at the heart of the Qabalistic system is a teaching concerning what we might call Qabalistic psychology. That teaching lays down instruction that discusses both the structure of the mind, and how that structure functions, and I will now explain how that is so.

Many modern Western Qabalists agree that one of the best places to go for information on Qabala is the teaching of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. If you are reading this and you do not have a good knowledge of the Golden Dawn system of Qabala, I recommend buying a copy of Israel Regardie's book 'A Garden of Pomegranates', which provides a good detailed description of all the fundamental ideas associated with Golden Dawn Qabala.

What the founders of the Golden Dawn system did was they took the key texts of Qabala, the Sepher Ha Zohar and the Sepher Ha Yetzirah, and they stripped away most of the religious and political teaching that the Hebrews have bunched together with the core occult teaching in Qabala. This is done with the intention of getting back to a more-or-less non-sectarian view of the real core ideas that Qabala teaches. This 'less Hebrew' form of the Golden Dawn Qabala is often referred to as Hermetic Qabala, because it is the style of Qabala most often studied by modern Western students of Hermetism.

The first place the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn starts to teach its students about Qabala is in its 'Knowledge Lectures'. As a new G.D. student works his way through the outer grades of the G.D. system he gets one Knowledge Lecture per grade he takes. In the Fifth Knowledge Lecture we see for the first time the basis Golden Dawn system of Qabalistic psychology. In that system the mind is divided in to six main functions ... which we should refer to as the six primary

"intelligences" of the mind (the Hebrew-Qabalistic term is Partzufim). A list of these intelligences looks like this, from the highest and most spiritual level of the mind down to its lowest level:

- (1) Arik Anpin ... (Macroprosopus - the vast countenance)
- (2) Abba ... The Father
- (3) Aima ... The Mother
- (4) Zaur Anpin ... the Son (Microprosopus - The lesser countenance)
- (5) Kalah ... Bride of Zaur Anpin
- (6) Nachash ... The Serpent (described in another GD knowledge lecture)

Zaur Anpin is also called Meleck (King), and Kalah is also called Malkah (Queen), which is good to keep in mind, because we will see that this King and Queen are the same King and Queen regularly described in classic alchemy.

These are all very official sounding titles, and at first might seem a bit hard to understand. But if we translate them in to modern concepts it is a system which we quickly can grasp because these ideas are actually quite commonly recognised.

Qabalists also give these intelligences many other names, but amongst them is a list of names that actually explains their functions, thus:

- (1) Yechidah - the unified mind (or higher self).
- (2) Chiah - Wisdom (or higher will)
- (3) Neschamah - Understanding (or, love for the higher self)
- (4) Ruach - Spirit (or the objective thinking function)
- (5) Nepesch - Lower soul (or the subjective feeling function)
- (6) Nachash - The Serpent (or Dragon) (Binary function)

It should now be obvious that what we have here is the system I have based the diagram from my previous post on (7 - Initiation). So it is a good idea to refer to that diagram while reading what I say below.

Qabala divides the mind firstly in to two levels or triads of existence. The upper level, which I call the Higher functions, which is composed of the Unified Mind, Wisdom and Understanding. This is the eternal part of us that exists deep within us, and survives the death of the lower mind. The Lower functions which are composed of the triad Ruach (the thinker), Nephesch (the feeler) and Nachash (the binary function).

Now, to cut a very complex and long story short, in explain what these functions are, I will explain them in the simplest way I know how.

Before you were born your consciousness resided in your Neschamah (-3). This is what Qabalists refer to as the 'Presence' of the divine. That is, the manifestation of your Highest Self. Like its spiritual body (non-physical). Neschamah is also known by descriptors such as Higher Soul, Higher Intelligence, the Reconciler, etc. Then, as you are born your consciousness crosses the line 'e' (see the last diagram) and incarnates in the physical body. The first 'mental' function that forms there is the Nachash. This is like the base-function of the human mind. For computer geeks this is like the BIOS (basic input-output system). The Nachash is what I have called the binary function, because it creates and sustains the two-ness of physical life, that is required to maintain physical existence (look back into my earlier lecture where I talk about the basis of physical reality and the binary manifestation of the unity function).

So your consciousness comes in to your physical body and already there is a mental function that maintains the 'condition' (binary function) that makes it possible for you to exist here.

The first 'expression' of that binary manifestation of the mind is the Nephesh (lower soul). This is the Neschamah 'fallen' into physical existence. In modern language we would call this the unconscious mind. This is the part of your mind where all the information about what you are is stored (see my previous discussion on the idea of the memory of nature and the anima mundi). The blue print of your physical body is stored in the Nephesh and that blueprint tells your foetus how to make new cells, and how their tasks must be established. This is the information that tells your fetal body how to grow and function. So Nephesh contains a memory of literally millions of years of human biological evolution. From her seat in the mind your heart beat is maintained, body temperature is maintained, digestion is regulated, and cell birth, life and death are maintained (for example). All of these bodily functions are part of the memory of nature and regulate your biology automatically from behind the scenes (unconsciously). This part of the mind (your Nephesh) kicks in to work, we might understand, while your body is immersed in a 'Watery' environment (this is an important alchemical idea).

Then as soon as the initial growing stage is complete you are ready to be born, you pop out of your mother into the world, take your first breath of 'Air' and your Ruach is born right at that moment. Your Ruach is the second pole of the mind-binary. The Ruach is the Chiah 'fallen' into physical existence.

The Nachash creates this binary. It is the basis of this binary. And that binary is made up of (-5) Nephesh, and (+4) Ruach. This is the lower triad of the mind established.

As soon as your Ruach is created (as a kind of blank thinking machine) you begin to start noticing things about the world you have been born in to. Ruach in Hebrew means 'Spirit' or Pneuma (Air), by the way. Now every sensation that your body is exposed to, through your five senses, is recognised by the Ruach and that recognition is recorded (remembered) by

the Nephesch. As you grow and develop everything in the world you are exposed to is 'seen' by Ruach, and 'remembered' by Nephesch. In this way you build up an enormous data base about every single thing in this world that you come across.

This 'sense and remember' process begins with what you know about your Mother. Because she is the first thing you experience. Because your Nephesch is the feminine pole of your mental binary, what your Nephesch is programmed in to understand about what a woman is, first comes from your observations about your mother. Then, about your sisters (if you had any), and then from observations about other women. This is how your Nephesch 'learns' what 'woman' is all about. So at the very root of your human mind, what you 'believe' about the 'idea' of woman comes from what you observed about women as a tiny baby.

Likewise, your Ruach is the masculine pole of the mind, and it observes and records everything about 'man' from your Father, first, then your brothers, and then other men who come into your life. This is how your Ruach learns what the idea of a man is.

This of course is the rule, but there are exceptions to how all of this works. But I'm not going into that complicated explanation here. For now we are looking at the ideal situation.

So, here you are, observing your world with your Ruach (the Ruach is the part of your mind which observes the outside world, thinks about it, and forms judgments about it), and its observations are being remembered by Nephesch. The kind of person you end up being, as you grow older, then, almost entirely depends on what you personally think about the things in life you observe. Your 'interpretation' of life. And how you interpret the things in your environment is based on what your Mother (first) and Father (second) and siblings, then close family friends, told you and showed you about reality.

That is a tree. That is a dog. That car is blue. That man is bad. That girl is pretty. Those people in that country are not good. Etc, etc. The ideas that are most often repeated to you in your formative years become like hard wired programming in your mind's operating system. That programming is hidden deep in your unconscious, and affects most things you do in life. The other thing that has a huge impact on how you deal with life is trauma. For example, if the first time you came across water in your life you fell in and almost drowned, the recorded memory you retain in your Nephesch will be dysfunctional, and is likely to affect your attitude about water for the rest of your life. This is one way phobias are created. It is also how psychotics and socio-paths are created (for example). They experience something in their early life that then affects and distorts their later development.

In this way, this is roughly how a human individual is built and functions. Up until about the age of seven the Ruach largely only takes in information, and doesn't really 'think' about it. (There is no filter until seven, so it largely accepts everything it is shown and told, at face value). But at around seven years the Ruach changes, and it starts to think about what it has learned, and what it is learning, and it forms its own judgments about these things. Now, instead of just sensory observations being recorded in the Nephesch (and affecting behaviour) we start to also record our own thoughts and judgments, and these personal thoughts and judgments help to form our 'individual' world view ... our personal philosophy of life. Remembering, though, that when this new Ruach phase begins, it is almost always influenced by what is already inside the Nephesch (early childhood programming).

From the above description we should be able to see that the view of life we have is mostly an inherited view. It is, on a macrocosmic scale, a meme. Almost as deeply inherited as our genes are. This is why a number of philosophers say that our

view of the world is a view of shared consensus. It is (roughly) a vision of reality we all agree upon.

In early childhood, as we learn more, and our observational and judgment skills develop, the 'link' (7 - in the diagram) we have with the Higher Functions becomes unconscious. We might say, in the way of an analogy, like the umbilical cord that is cut and separates us from the womb at birth, this cord to the Higher Functions becomes deeply hidden inside us during childhood. With different people the severing of the link with the Higher Functions happens more or less slowly. By adolescence in most of us awareness of that connection is entirely unconscious. But the fact it still exists, to a greater or lesser degree, in early childhood, explains why many children have psychic experiences. Later in life (we might note) many occultists will claim that they have a special connection with the occult, because of childhood interest in things spiritual. But the truth is in most cases this is not a sign of special connection with the occult. It is simply a lingering expression of a state of awareness that existed before birth.

So up to this point in my explanation, this describes how the average person becomes an average person, with all his or her quirks of nature ... and his or her focus and reliance on physical life. Deep in our unconscious mind our Higher Functions still operate and affect what we are, but we are almost entirely unaware of this part of ourselves. Our developing life in the physical increasingly forces our attention on to physical existence, and the struggle for survival in life.

In this way our Ruach has the job of observing the world (aka: objective awareness), and making judgments about the world so we can learn to survive here. At the same time our Nephesh (subjective function) saves all those observations and judgments in our memory for later access, and as a means of designing and creating our world (re: the anima mundi function).

A deeply important part of this mind machine is the Nachash, The binary function. Its job, all through our life, as we develop, is to maintain the two-ness view of everything we come across. Because of this, whenever we experience trauma, it is the Nachash which specifically stores those memories, because trauma is associated with fear, and fear is a powerful 'divider'. At the same time, every single conflict we experience in our lives, no matter how big or small, is a conflict that is either created or maintained by the Nachash. Because conflict is a powerful 'divider'. Every opposition we have about something. Every disagreement we have about things. Every dislike we hold about things ... all these things create and maintain division in our world, and in our world view.

These divisions maintain the binary illusion of existence, but they also stimulate the urge to learn, to find solutions to problems, and to find harmony and balance in life. For without division there is no recognition of or urge toward balance. This is an extremely important concept, that exists at the very core of what we are as humans, and which, as we shall see ... is the root of our eventual desire to complete our need for binary existence, and once again find harmony and Higher Understanding. To discover alchemy, and to use that mechanism to evolve ourselves away from a need for extreme division in our lives, back to unity (the Stone of the Philosophers).

The kinds of ideas I have explained so far are ideas that the old Qabalists would have been well aware of. We know this today because, although, unlike myself, who has just explained these ideas in clear language, the old Qabalists saw these ideas as big secrets, so they recorded their knowledge of them in veiled stories. That is, they cunningly designed stories which often look on the surface like historical records, but had hidden in them ciphers and allegories, which explained stages of human development, and specific ideas about psycho-spiritual

functions. Then they scattered these stories through their religious and mystical writings, assuring themselves that only people who had been trained to tell which stories were significant, and how to decipher them, could understand their inner meaning. A good example of this type of information record and transmission can be seen in Arthur Edward Waite's book 'The Holy Kabbalah' (which is another commentary on the Zohar).

So now that we have established what a normal average human is, and how he or she got that way, what role does initiation play? ... and how does it come in to play?

ESSAY TEN

Recognising and Fixing Dysfunction

So we came into this life because our Higher Functions require it (see my previous notes on how unity cannot grow and evolve without binary). In order to become everything we are in potential, we must express our inner nature and bring it out into the open where it be recognised and Understood. This is why binary existence was created, because the binary allows for growth, where Unity cannot.

Here we are, then, now as adults. Our mind and body are built upon a perfect model or blueprint that exists in the memory of the world (anima mundi). Then as we were developing as a very young infant our mind was trained how to experience and how to approach the world by people who are close to us (family and friends). Of course, even though each of these people has developed their own way of understanding and surviving in the world, and they are passing on that understanding to us (their memes), those understandings are not entirely accurate, and in some cases contain serious flaws, which is only natural. Along with our inheritance of those flaws, we also stumble across accidents in life, which cause us trauma, and establish dysfunctions in our view of the world and our behaviour. Everyone is subject to these errors in programming ... without exception.

Now, the whole point in being alive is to express our inner potential. This means not only our beneficial potential, but also our dysfunctions, and nature has evolved a very interesting way of doing this ... and its an mechanism a lot of people struggle with understanding. So I suggest, if you don't get this the first time, re-read it and think about it until you grasp what I'm saying.

Previously I have said that everything we are is stored in our personal unconscious (our personal version of the anima mundi). I also explained that this 'memory' of what we have experienced is part of the mechanism that creates our reality. So, for example, the anima mundi doesn't just tell cells how to grow, but it also actually builds our external reality, based on what we contain in our unconscious.

When we look out at the world around us, that world is like a collective agreement by all living beings about what the world should look like. It is the 'collective unconscious' externalised ... literally. So the world around us is like the hardcopy of the software that has stored all of humanities experience. So in a manner, it is like a virtual reality.

We know that when we travel around in this world stuff happens here which everyone agrees upon. There are trees, dogs, fish, taxes, and war, and we hate today's price of oranges. But we also know that within this bigger picture stuff is going on that is personal to ourselves. At this level we might understand that within the collective understanding about what the world is, our personal journey is overlaid ... our personal journey modifies our immediate environment to cause things to happen to us, which we require for our personal growth.

The way this happens is that, since we cannot (under normal conditions) look inside our mind and see what's there, and what needs fixing, our Nephesh (unconscious mind) projects the content of our unconscious out onto the exterior world. Modern psychology, to a degree, recognises this factor and has its own ways of explaining it. So, for example, it can be said that when we dislike something in someone else, what we are actually seeing in them is a fault in our own mind. In other words, a fault in our own mind is 'projected' on to the exterior person. Another way of saying this is ... let's imagine a woman who is afraid of chickens. Every time she sees one she becomes rigid with fear ... and in her way of looking at the situation ... there is

something dangerous about chickens. Of course the rest of us look at chickens and wonder what on earth is wrong with the woman. So what is the difference between the woman with the fear, and everyone else? The difference is the woman with the fear is projecting a problem she personally has, on to something that itself does not express that problem.

This mechanism happens in every area of our lives. I can never really know what you are as a person. What I 'believe' you are is always a matter of personal interpretation, and personal interpretation is always affected by the 'stuff' we have been programmed with in childhood. It decides for us why we buy a blue car instead of a green one. Why we chat-up a particular guy at the night club over some other guy. Why we end up a road worker over a politician. In other words, the way we personally view the world, because of the quirks in our unconscious, defines the nature of our reality ... defines how we experience the world.

Also, in this way, we are forced over and over again to face certain types of situation until we recognise what is happening, and attempt to understand the problem, until we can learn how to fix it. Anyone who has lived through many close relationships with partners of the opposite gender will recognise that often we keep falling for the exact same kind of person over and over again, no matter how much we try to avoid repeating our previous mistakes in such relationships.

Thusfar, this is how normal human life unfolds. For most of our existence we are victim to our projections. But at a certain stage in our journey we suddenly click as to what is going on, and we then are urged by an inner desire to fix our dysfunctions, to search for a method which will bring us more harmony. This is the point, whether we know it or not at the time, that the tables have turned and our inner condition is pointing us in the direction of the exit door. For the average person at that point how long it takes them to find a source of

guidance that will get them to where they need to be (back in balance) depends on how much garbage they still need to fix, and how co-operative they are with themselves about finding solutions.

Then, when a certain flash-point is reached, the Unity Mind in us takes over a more complete control of our projection onto the world, and it projects itself onto someone in our environment, and that exterior person becomes (as it were) the vehicle for the drive back toward balance for the individual. In this way the teacher finds the student, not the other way around.

The true process of initiation is not begun, though, until that aspirant has found a teacher who has the ability to re-establish a link between the aspirant's lower functions, and his Higher Functions. Any other situation, of an occult nature, that looks like initiation, but cannot and does not re-establish that link, is simply a prelude to true Hermetic Training. This is because, as only an initiate can really Understand, ultimately the solution to the problem of life is only found through establishing that link with the Higher Functions, the only place where the 'answer' resides.

This can be relatively easily demonstrated, because anyone who is actually in the position of being a true initiator can see, in their mind's eye, (metaphorically) a list of the individuals who are on their way to becoming his students, in the manner of a type of psychological rolodex. At the same time any student of such a teacher is usually taught, early on, how to prove for himself how from an internal level (in the unconscious) the entire 'connection' between teacher and student was already established before the student even became aware of an urge to seek instruction. This aspect of the true initiatory relationship is one that any true student, and any true teacher, are both very much aware of ... as much as any average person knows who their family is.

Ok, so all of this is a little airy fairy for most people. There would, at this point, often be the sigh, and the query ... well, ok, if all of this is true, so what? ... and there is a couple of key points to be made here :)

(1) That there is a point in being 'average', and that is that we ... individually and collectively have a lot of rubbish yet to fix before we can even be ready for the cool stuff.

(2) That being ready to finish off the fixing process requires 'ripeness', and this is a point that the old alchemical Adepti often made a point of.

(3) That any attempt at trying to end the game before official time-out only results in a slap in the face from life.

(4) That once ripeness is reached, even though we can stall 'getting with the program', trying to remain average becomes increasingly more uncomfortable as we ourselves slowly become less average ourselves, because of the way we are starting to think and behave.

'Normal' living is a highly addictive behaviour. No matter how much we try to tell ourselves we are going to seek Spiritual Illumination with all of our heart's desire, the 'reality' is that if we try, we find the chocolate of herd existence is hard to walk past in the supermarket of life. For those who try to remain on the fence, and not enter into the alchemical process of life that leads to an extreme Higher expression of self, usually a crisis eventuates which forces the situation.

Either way, when The Great Alchemist Of The Universe recognises you are ripe for the Great Work, you will find yourself facing the Threshold of the Ancient Mysteries, a candidate for Hermetic initiation, and the Guardian checking your credentials of admission. When that happens, the first stage of the training process, exactly as we see in the process of lab alchemy, begins with Death and Putrefaction.

At this stage of this human life we are at the same point in the lab work where the alchemist takes his crude matter, from nature, and begins his Great Work upon it. The aspirant being 'actually' ready for training (as opposed to assuming he is), the alchemist takes him as his crude matter, and begins the inner alchemical Great Work upon him. The student is the subject of the experiment, not some idle by-stander, where the alchemist will now treat him as he would treat his laboratory materia, manipulating his crude state to bring about extreme changes in him, with the purpose of producing a substance which in the final stage of the work will be radically different from the substance as it was taken from nature.

ESSAY ELEVEN

A Candidate at the Threshold

A new student of inner alchemy ... a novice ... is someone who for the first time has requested real hermetic 'initiation' and training from an expert (aka: an Adept, in the true meaning of the word). No matter what he or she has studied before, of esoteric subjects, or has been involved in before ... there is always that dividing line in the sand between involvement in popular occultism and the first time the student approaches and is accepted by a bona-fide Adept, capable of opening that link between the lower and Higher Functions of the mind.

Whatever happened previous to being accepted as a student of a true initiator is almost inconsequential. Of course it all matters in that it helped the candidate get to where he now finds himself, but the reality is the nature of the training from this point forward is going to be quite unlike anything he has previously experienced, or that which he 'presumes' will now form part of his training. For this reason, no matter what exalted grade or title he may have been used to having attained in systems of training previously, every new candidate arrives at the Threshold to real initiation a novice.

This is an important concept because about half of individuals who are accepted for real initiatic alchemical training fail to complete the training early in the work because they cannot let go of assumptions about what the work will require of them, and what it is about. Those assumptions often place conditions on the work that do not naturally belong there, and so the candidate can be recognised, sooner or later, as having an agenda, and that agenda will often be found to have nothing to do with the method and the goal of hermetic initiation, and alchemical training.

When the lab alchemist chooses a plant or metal that will become the focus of his lab work, he does not perform that work in the field or in the mine. The laboratory is the location of the work. An analogous situation exists with the initiation and training of a novice student. His training is not carried out in the environment of his everyday life, his natural habitat. It is carried out in the seclusion of the metaphorical or actual laboratory. A space and time specially set aside for the work, where the common activities of everyday life do not intrude.

The plant or metal cannot be used in the work as they come from the field or the mine. They must be cleaned, broken up, often ground to small particles and often heated in order to prepare them for the process. The situation with the candidate for initiation is the same. His 'condition', as an everyday person, is not conducive to the alchemical process. Therefore he or she needs to learn a number of new skills and behaviours, and change a number of old habits, before being in a position to learn and experience alchemy. The way I often describe this stage of the work is that the novice needs to re-learn how to learn. Part of this process usually begins by focusing on two problems: (1) the habit of 'assuming', and (2) the habit of not following instruction exactly.

Hermetism is a science, and therefore initiation, like any scientific experiment is based on a specific formula, designed to provide specific results. In order to attain the goal of real Hermetic Initiation ... Spiritual Illumination ... an exact and specific process must be used. One of the first and most common problems that is recognised as being part of training novices are their 'assumptions' about what this process is (this formula is), how it is structured, and how it will be taught. These assumptions are usually based on the idea that real initiation must be the same (or very similar) to initiation in other (popular) systems. If that was true then popular systems would not only work, but they would also be based strictly on accurate alchemical principles. It will be found in most cases this is not

the reality. Likewise in real esoteric initiation was like popular systems, it simply wouldn't work, because popular system, largely, do not themselves work. What defines the difference between popular systems and the real thing is that the real thing works, it works quickly and to an extreme degree. For it to be in that category reason dictates that training must indeed, then, be different from popular systems claiming initiatory rites.

In this way, based on assumptions which come from previous experience, many novices will approach their training by doing things that they either have done in previous training, or that they assume are required by real, effective training. The result of this kind of behaviour is usually that these 'tweaks' on the effective instruction work towards undermining the process. One of the reasons why 'conventional' (popular) training systems often are not effective in attaining real results, and quickly, is because they either are delivered in such a way that makes them impotent, or because students are allowed to deal with the instruction in any way they feel might be more helpful, or 'easier'.

It should be understood that if the novice already knew the inner alchemical method well enough to know how it works, and how to make it work (on himself), he wouldn't require a teacher. The first premise about the tuition relationship is that the student requests training from an expert because he actually needs the expert's help. The problem often arises, though, that the student makes inaccurate judgment calls about what help will entail, what he wants help with and what he wants to deal with in his own way.

Changing the process of training ... altering its instructions ... in any way at all, can be likened to changing a recipe for baking a cake. Each ingredient in the recipe is there for a reason. The flour serves a specific function. So do the eggs, sugar and milk. Their exact quantities are important. So if we leave out an ingredient, or add one that wasn't on the list, or alter their

quantities ... "without first understanding the role each item and its quantity play in the final success of the cake" ... that alteration will always change the final outcome ... and could cause all kinds of problems en route to the final goal.

So this is where the second most common problem arises. Not following instruction exactly. It is a curious fact that out of 100s of students the Heredom Group has accepted for training, that less than 1% of novices pay any attention at all to the promise they make, at the beginning of training, to follow all lesson instructions 'exactly' ... "without adding to, subtracting from, or modifying". When one is in the position of facilitating the alchemical initiatory process, and has the benefit of overseeing dozens of students of all ages, both genders, advanced intelligence and of average intelligence, with previous well developed experience in Western esoterica, and with little previous experience ... and you come to witness how often, and to what degree, novices change the instructions they are provided with ... the mind literally boggles.

The inner alchemical process is specifically designed to seriously and deeply alter the student's mind in such a way that those changes will then seriously and deeply change his life. Changes that lead quickly to accepting new knowledge, new understanding, a new structure of mind, a new level of function, and new behaviours ... all to an extreme. An uninformed novice who feels it is ok to alter carefully designed instruction, is almost accepting ... like the cake recipe analogy ... that changes that occur because of those changes could lead to serious problems.

The exact same problem occurs with lab tuition. After the standard warnings provided, and the usual exchange of promises to work strictly according to instruction, I have (for example) had a student who had a serious stroke (which almost killed him), because he overdosed on a powerful metallic preparation. Even after discussing the problem with him (some

months after he had his speech and semi-normal motor functions back), he still insisted that he had the right to do whatever he wanted, and initially would not admit that in fact he had taken a dose 100s of times greater than the traditional recommendation. The outcome of his decision was still not enough to teach him the lesson that the student is not the teacher and that alchemy is dangerous in uninformed hands. I have also witnessed a number of equally dangerous effects from the inner work, as a result of students who stubbornly refuse to follow instruction exactly ... for their own safety and in order to ensure success.

From this angle we might understand that more often than not the common issue of whether or not the teacher is 'kosher' is frequently not the issue. Many students of the occult question the entire culture of the occult teacher and the teacher-student relationship. But they rarely ask themselves ... is the student himself ripe for the task? Does the student respect the position of the teacher and of the training system? Does he recognise that if he already knew enough to know what makes the process work, and therefore what won't undermine it, that he wouldn't need a teacher? Will he read and follow instruction with the degree of care that the journey to Spiritual Illumination would warrant? Where is his primary focus? Is it on the Great Work, or on something else?

How often does anyone succeed in any deeply serious endeavour when he is not fully focused on it? The reality is that in 99 percent of cases the answer is, to some degree, no. Nevertheless, a good teacher will understand that most of his new students come to tuition with many assumptions and preconceptions, part of which will cause them to believe they know enough to tweak their tuition work in a way that they feel will be more beneficial, and/or make it easier. With that understanding a good teacher will take all necessary precautions to assure the novice is not exposed to anything dangerous until he has proved he can and will follow instruction

exactly, and if he won't, then to end his tuition on the basis that at the least success is unlikely, and at worst the journey could be too dangerous for him.

So here we have the student, standing at the outside of the metaphorical Threshold to the Mysteries of alchemy. Knocking at the gate may elicit a response, and the door may be opened, but entrance is not guaranteed. Alchemy is a mystery, as is the process of initiation. In this way the journey in to alchemy is a journey in to the unknown for the novice ... not a journey into something which is already understood. This is why an expert teacher is a natural necessity ... because when traveling into the unknown, when entering the Mystery, a guide is always the preferred option ... especially when we are not simply a sightseer, but have a specific goal in mind. How do we get from 'A' (a known location) to 'B' (inside a unknown territory)?

At this point, when the aspirant approaches the Threshold seeking admission, and he is tested and assessed as being properly prepared, willing and able, a new situation arises in the student's life that has never existed (significantly) before. When he is accepted for initiation and training, and the Adept has confirmed that he will behave in a way that will assure maximum safety and opportunity for success ... the Nachash awakens, as he recognises that his mandate of assuring the novice stays firmly entrenched in common human life is now under threat. It is a curious property of the Nachash that it possess an understanding of that which constitutes effective initiation and recognises when the aspirant is involved in an effective system, and when he isn't.

While 'preparing' the novice in a way that will help him overcome the habit of assumption, and the nasty habit of not following instruction exactly, is a relatively simple situation ... dealing with an awakened Nachash Function is a whole other matter. This situation is one few occultists are aware of ... even though ideas about this Guardian are scattered around here

and there in a good number of esoteric texts, and can be found as part of most Masonic based group ritual systems such as that of the Order of the Golden Dawn. But knowing what the Guardian really is, in the literal sense (not just as a symbol or metaphor), what its function is, and how it will behave when awakened, is something very few people know anything about.

One of the reasons why the old Adepts referred to the (metaphorical) location of the Guardian as 'The Threshold' or 'Gate' to the Mysteries, and why they gave that intelligence the title 'Guardian', is because this stage in the process, if not understood and mastered, is a sure and secure boundary that keeps all comers away from access to repeatably reliable experience of Higher Knowledge.

Nature has assured herself that the way in which the Guardian appears to the novice, is so threatening, and the solution to how the Guardian effect is neutralised, is so unusual (counter intuitive), that the chances that anyone would find the way of truly entering-in through this Threshold are so unlikely, without having the 'key' given you by someone who already possesses it.

I make this point so emphatically, and repeat it here, because I realise that a good many people who adhere to the modern popular theory of self initiation, because they have 'issues' with the whole teacher-pupil culture of esoteric training, will look at the concept of the Guardian as I have presented it here and deeply dislike the entire idea that they may not be able to make significant ... significant ... progress in hermetic initiation without help. While this situation is pervasive throughout the whole esoteric community, I believe it is less serious an issue in magical circles than in alchemical ones. At least in the magical community the concept of formal tuition in organised schools is well known, and many solo practitioners will eventually concede to give up their isolation and seek training in such a school. But the alchemical tradition, especially

today (but also largely in the past) has never really had that same focus on organised formal training systems. Most modern alchemists see one of the defining qualities of the alchemical community as being that it is composed mainly of single individuals studying alone. Whether that view has historical precedence or not.

But the fact remains, I cannot think of a single individual in the laboratory tradition (by itself) who is known to have made significant progress and was never the student of a classically educated teacher. Where the inner tradition is concerned the situation is the same.

So this is the core theme of the beginning of the work. Firstly, that in order to be able to start the work effectively (to enter-in through the Threshold, metaphorically speaking), the keys to effective learning and practice must be given, accepted and used ... in exactly the right way. "The entrance is narrow, and the way straight" ... as the old Adepts would say. Secondly, that when the Threshold is approached in the right manner, and the work begin in the right way, because the 'matter' has been properly prepared, the first result of that proper preparation and approach is that the matter must 'die' and will putrefy.

We have already see how the natural substance taken in hand by the lab alchemist 'dies' philosophically ... so the question that is often asked by the novice is now ... how does the aspirant novice die, philosophically, as the inner Great Work is begun in him?

ESSAY TWELVE

The Death of the Alchemist

For [he] must die to the world, to the flesh and
to all the senses and to the whole man animal,
who would enter into the closest of secrets ...”

The above quote is taken from a relatively well known book
called "The
Rosie Crucian Secrets" 1713.

The book is basically a workbook on alchemy. It contains a
narrative
description of a path to the Philosophers Stone, a
comprehensive
collection of serious lab recipes, a lexicon of old technical
terms
and some information about the Rosicrucian fraternity.
Altogether it
is a serious volume, compiled from various sources by
someone who knew
a lot of important truths about alchemy. Even though that
text is
largely a workbook for a lab alchemist, the author of the
above quote
obviously understood the inner and more esoteric side of
alchemy. That
little quote contains all of the key ideas that describe what
'initiation' in to the inner alchemical practice is all about.

That text, and the view it presents to the knowledgeable
reader, is a
sample of a teaching from an individual, or group, who were
involved

in both sides of the alchemical game. So we might ask ourselves ...

why would a man who had the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life

be interested in the concept and practice of internal alchemy ... of

initiation ... if he didn't have to, when he already has everything he

needs to live a comfortable and productive life?

Before I explain the meaning contained in the above quote, I will take

a moment to explain the schema of the initiatory plan in very basic

terms. So that we can be sure you understand what it is we are

considering in this section of my overall discussion.

As I have described earlier, the old Adepts of the Hermetic tradition

knew that in order to be able to grasp the real meaning of alchemy,

and to be able to Understand it to enough of a degree to solve its

problems, and complete its work, the alchemist first needed to

re-establish the link between the lower and the Higher Functions of

the mind. They referred to the process of training someone to open

that link as 'hermetic initiation'. They also said that this process

must be taught by someone who already had that link opened through his

own initiation, and they called this passing down of the initiatory

knowledge and experience ... 'the ancient chain of transmission'. They called it 'ancient' because they knew, from experience, that this link could not be opened by someone, by themselves. So reason dictated that since this system of initiatory practice still existed today, that it must form an unbroken chain of training ... "mouth to ear, hand to hand, brother to brother" ... from the remotest period of human sentient existence. Since we know from historic record that people were practicing initiatory techniques as least as long ago as 4000 years.

The goal of initiation is not only to re-establish that link between lower and Higher Functions, but to push it, and push it, in the student, until its use as a tool of cognition has gained enough momentum that it would not wither and shut down again. It had to re-established as a habit of thinking. When that irreversible momentum had been established, the resulting condition of mind ... the state of the Adept's personal psychology ... was referred to in the Western tradition as ... Spiritual Illumination. That is, the Higher Functions were now illuminated by the light of conscious awareness ... instead of existing in the darkness of the unconscious.

So the goal of hermetic initiation is Spiritual Illumination,
and
Spiritual Illumination is understood by those who have
attained it, as
the true beginning of a life of Mastery.

Understanding this much, we can now look at that quote
and describe
what it means, and understand that description in relation to
the work
and goal of initiation.

Spiritual Illumination is a state of mind which is 'more than
human'.
The normal human condition is taken as the starting
material, and it
is altered in order to develop the state of Illumination. When
a
person has reached that state he, or she, has become
something that
developed beyond the accepted definition of human. What
this means is
that in order to attain Spiritual Illumination you cannot
remain what
you are today. You have to become something else. Not
just on the
weekends, or when you can be bothered, but permanently.
Once that
state is attained, it cannot be turned back in to normality
again.

Many people who insist their sole desire in life is to attain
that
goal, also often have this weird almost unconscious belief
that

somehow they are going to walk the path of initiation, and hopefully become Illuminated, but essentially remain who they are today. Almost like they see esoteric initiation as being the attainment of information that will make their life esoterically funky, but which information they can use or ignore as the whim takes them. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Illumination is something we 'become' ... not something we have access too on a whim, like a facebook account.

This is the fundamental meaning of the part of our quote that says ...

"... For [he] must die to the world, to the flesh and to all the senses..."

In other words, initiation is a process which kills-off our normal human behaviours and views. Dying to the world means that the purpose for the world's existence, and your need for a place in that game, no longer holds your attention. Your purpose for existence and your needs now become something else other than that which normal people require. To die to the flesh means that one of the fundamental tools that keep us immersed in physical life, the needs and impulses of our biological body, no longer dictate our focus. To die to all the senses means that

we no longer are attracted by the things which stimulate our physical senses. Since the life of a normal person is greatly trapped in the habit of judging according to sensory experience, and of appeasing the pleasant sensations our senses are capable of.

All of these ideas together add up to dying to ...

"... the whole man animal ..."

The focus and concern of the Illuminated Adept is not that of pandering to his animal needs of shelter, food and reproduction.

Something happens to the Adept, as a natural part of what he has become, which allows these natural requirements to be met automatically, without his constant struggle to obtain these needs.

Because of this his focus can now be turned to Higher concerns, beyond the realm of seeking creature comforts.

Then the whole scenario is summed up in the motive for attaining this state where the old self has died, and a new self is reborn from the ashes. This is all done because it is necessary for anyone ...

"...who would enter into the closest of secrets ..."

Who would put themselves in a position to access the deepest secrets

of nature, and therefore understand the mechanics of alchemy, which lead to a knowledge of how the Stone and the Elixir can be produced.

Since few people ... few occultists even ... really understand this concept of death of the old self, and resurrection of the self in a new form, and they have even less knowledge of how that process is attained in a practical manner ... when a new student enters alchemical training as an initiate and insists he (or she) seriously wants to attain Spiritual Illumination ... it is kind of humorous that in fact they really don't know what they are asking for. Again, if they really understood how to attain that goal in practical terms, and understood what the goal really was, they wouldn't need a teacher and guide. So the average new student often rocks up to the Threshold exclaiming that they desperately want this new state of Being, believing that they virtually have a right to possess it simply because they ask for it, when in fact they really have no real concept of what they are doing. We know this from experience because when novice students begin real training two things happen in about 80 percent of cases

Firstly, being exposed to real training is a self evident process. As

we move through the tuition we quickly realise ... OMG this is the real thing! ... because almost completely unexpected, it works. It does all those things we have always secretly expected from serious initiation. So the novice suddenly finds himself in a weird situation where he can no longer ignore what is happening, nor deny that he is on an escalator to Illumination.

Secondly, that as soon as the reality of initiation hits them in the face often the first reaction is ... STOP! ... I want to re-evaluate my situation here! And that re-evaluation a large percentage of the time ends in the conclusion that ... in fact ... they no longer want Illumination. They are too comfortable with 'normal me'. Its a ... "better the devil you know" scenario for most novices. The habitual comforts and discomforts of normal life suddenly seem much more inviting than the now stark reality that one's mind and life are, with increasing speed, chugging toward a completely unknown destination. The ego and its arrogance of believing it has all this occult training and initiation stuff in the bag, suddenly collapses ... and the truth, if even only a small dose of it, is staring them right in the face.

What the Adept initiator knows about all of this, though, because he has walked the whole distance himself previously, and come out the other end, is that this 'fear' of initiation and Illumination is generated by the Nachash, as a ploy to bring the aspirant back into line with its mandate, to keep the individual as an active member of the herd ... as a normal human. For about 80 percent of novices that is exactly what happens. After all, the Nachash ... the Guardian of the Mysteries ... has had a million years to become skilled at its plan of attack, so it is no idiot. On the contrary ... "the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field".

For the remaining 20 percent, about half of them 'feel the fear and do it anyway' ... not really understanding what they are getting in to, but intuition drives them forward on the basis that they feel that is the only option they have. The last 10 percent are spiritually mature enough that they quickly recognise exactly what is going on, they recognise it is only the lower functions that are afraid ... afraid of dying ... and they walk through the Threshold with the compliance of the Guardian. It is from that last 10 percent, and maybe a small number of the previous 10 percent, that the alchemists who succeed in

achieving the Stone and the Elixir, who understand what they have, and who make the most of it, are drafted.

In the final estimation anyone, almost, can claim a place in that last

10 percent. All it requires is: (1) to place the goal of attaining Illumination before *all else*, (2) to follow the expert initiator's

instruction exactly, (3) to feel the fear and do what is required

anyway. Ignore any one of these three conditions and its "game over".

Its the same as telling nature ... I'm not ready yet, other things are more important to me.

- (1) Unconditional commitment
- (2) Give up control, to gain control
- (3) Do not give in to those things which maintain division

To 'live' these behaviours is to ... "die to the world, to the flesh

and to all the senses and to the whole man animal..."

Anyone who is familiar with training in any Masonic based magical

fraternity will know that at some point they will find themselves as a

candidate in a ritual in which they are expected to symbolically

reenact their own death, and resurrection. Anyone who has passed the

Golden Dawn 5=6 ceremony or been 'raised' a Master Mason, in the

Masonic Blue Lodge Degrees, will be very familiar with this concept

and experience. To take part in such a ceremony, as candidate, is to be guided through a sacred drama where many of the ideas associated with the things I have discussed in this essay are explained to you in esoteric symbolism. Many of the occultists or Freemasons who pass through these death and rebirth rites haven't the slightest clue as to what they mean, in fact. But the old Adepts, who instituted this kind of sacred drama, and who included the Death and Rebirth rite of passage in their schema, knew exactly what it means, because they themselves were links in the ancient chain of transmission, and those symbollic rites were their message to those who were ripe for the Understanding.

So what about the details of how this Death of one's old self, and Rebirth of one's new Higher Self, actually pan out in practice?

ESSAY THIRTEEN

The First Stage of the Inner Work - Separation

So now, for those capable of getting a little more Qabalistically technical ... a quick rant about the details of the formula of alchemical initiation.

The alchemical process is divided into three main stages. This essay describes the theory of the first stage of the process by which a novice alchemist is guided up to the experience of the condition we call Spiritual Illumination.

Caveat: If you have been following my discourse up to this point, then you will be aware that there are some risks with attempting to put this process in to practice without the guidance of an experienced teacher. For this reason I will not be explaining everything necessary to put the process I describe here in to practice. I give this caution on the basis of the fact that I know from experience there is always someone watching who believes he is knows better, and will attempt experimenting with this information. To do so would be foolish. Enough said.

What we are looking at here is a technique for carrying out the inner alchemical process. What this means is this process is based on, and takes advantage of, the laws of alchemy which nature has placed in government over the mind and our outer reality.

The field of play for this process is the imagination. That is, the work itself is a form of active meditation similar, but more extensive than, that which is commonly known as pathworking or 'skrying in the spirit vision'. The practice of Jungian active imagination also makes use of a technique similar to this alchemical method.

The first premise about this process is that the mind governs our entire reality. That our outer world is the way it is because of the structure and function of our inner world. The latter holds the blueprint of the former. This is a well known and widely accepted concept in esoteric circles. In this way, if we change our mind, we also change our exterior reality. 'Everything' that we recognise as our reality is changed.

The second premise upon which this work is based is that we are only aware of part of our reality. That is, reality as a whole is part conscious, for us, and part unconscious. The goal of the inner alchemical work is to take our conscious awareness inside, into that place which is normally hidden from us ... the unconscious. If we achieve this goal then we will have converted our two-side world (one side conscious, one side unconscious) into a one-side world ... completely conscious. This is what one famous philosopher called ... becoming aware of ... "the totality of our being". This is also what we refer to as 'full Illumination'.

To a certain degree the 'conscious' part of our mind (Ruach) overlaps with the 'unconscious' (Nephesch). (See the attached diagram - parts of mind.gif). This area of overlap is what we experience as our imagination. When you close your eyes and imagine an apple, you are using this overlap area. When you imagine the aroma of an apple you are using this overlap area. When you imagine biting the apple, and are aware of its taste, you are using this overlap area. Each one of the external senses can be duplicated here. Also, when you are consciously aware of dreaming, you are operating inside that overlap area.

One of the things we know, based both on traditional theory and on experience, is that this region of 'imagination' is where our personal Neschamah is manifesting. That is, our imagination is our Neschamah ... a piece of the Higher Functions that we can be directly aware of. We know this

because we know that in very practical terms if we merge the function of our Nephesch with the function of our Ruach (to even a small degree), the result at the region of the merge is Neschamah.

In the laboratory tradition we know that when we perform a destructive distillation (pyrolytic distillation) on any natural organic system, the result of that distillation is three substances. The first is water, the second is a volatile spirit, and the third is a compound of organic oil-like substances. The physical substance that carries the (non-physical) Ruach is the compound of oils, which alchemists call 'Red Mercury' and 'our Sun'. The physical substance that carries the (non-physical) Nephesch is the volatile spirit which we call 'White Mercury' and 'our Moon'. (See the attached diagram - rosarium fountain.gif). From them are separated the Four Elements. (See in the diagram the four stars in the four corners of the diagram, which represent the four Elements - two in the white fume, two in the red fume).

If you are familiar with the Order of the Golden Dawn's Equinox ceremony you will also know that the ritual officer known as the Hegemon is the symbolic representation of the Neschamah, who is referred to in that rite as the 'reconciler between them' (the Elements). She is the fifth star in the upper centre of the diagram which represents the manifestation of the Q-state, or quintessence. The fifth Element. In other words when the binary manifestations of the Sun and Moon overlap (web or merge) a fifth thing arises, Neschamah.

We also know that the merging of the Ruach and Nephesch not only produces the Neschamah, but that at the same time the 'Presence' of the Neschamah causes the Ruach and Nephesch to increase their merging, until eventually, as this feedback loop increases in its intensity, the two primary poles of the binary, Sun and Moon, become one new function entirely (Neschamah).

We also know that the imagination (subconscious) is the overlap area of the conscious (Ruach) and unconscious (Nephesch) faculties because the images, smells, sounds, feelings and tastes that we can experience in the imagination are known to be 'uploaded' into the imagination from the memory (Nephesch). At the same time those memories ended up in the Nephesch from conscious (Ruach) observation of the outer world. So when you imagine an apple in your subconscious, for example, you are drawing on something which is stored in the Nephesch, but had its origin in the Ruach's observation of the outer world. In other words, your Neschamah is 'confecting' the imaginary apple from a stored memory which at some point actually existed externally.

Similarly, if we imagine ourselves walking in a park, every object in that imaginary park was uploaded into imagination from memory, and pieced together to form a 'mocked-up' scene of a park. To a certain degree this is what a dream is ... a mocked-up drama using pieced together images from our memory, to create a new composite scene, or relive an old scene.

But a dream is more than this, it is a story about things which are happening inside the Nephesch, in relation to things that are occurring in your reality at all levels. But, since we cannot normally look into the Nephesch directly, and see what is going on there, we have to translate what is going on in there into a condition that our Ruach can recognise. A good analogy of this situation is that the content of the Nephesch is like the content of your computer hard drive. If you ripped upon your computer and pulled apart the hard drive in order to look at all the information you have stored there on the magnetic disk, you simply could not recognise that data in its native format. If you want to see the data on your hard drive you need the rest of your computer hardware, and its installed software, to translate that raw data into a form that your Ruach can recognise. In your

computer the result of all of this is your computer operating system. Your computer operating system is a Graphic User Interface ... that is, it is a graphic (symbolic) representation of what is on your hard drive. Similarly your imagination, in your mind, is your own Graphic User Interface, translating the raw data in your Nephesh in to a form that your Ruach can look at, and recognise.

If you understand this much, and realise that the 'windows' in your Microsoft Operating System, or Macintosh or Linux Operating System are composed partially of pictures of things that are like things in the real world, and they are arranged in such a way as to give us an analogous idea of what is on the hard drive, then you can see how close the computer metaphor is to the mind structure and function.

So what you 'see' (and smell, and taste and touch and hear) in your imagination (Neschamah), is actually a manifestation of the invisible stuff which is contained inside your Nephesh. With this in mind, the field of play for the internal alchemical process is set. The imagination is our laboratory. Because we know for a fact that (1) if we manipulate the content of our imagination in the *right way*, we also manipulate the content of our unconscious, and (2) that our unconscious is the laboratory where our outer reality is created. So if we can successfully manipulate our Nephesh the structure and function of our outer reality is also manipulated ... and experience proves this to a striking degree.

The basic concepts here are relatively well known. Even though they usually are not explained or understood in the way I have described them here. The idea that mind rules matter, and that the manipulation of mind also alters matter is the core dynamic here. But the problem with most attempts at putting this idea into effective action is that it is usually not very successful. But the true system of hermetic philosophy turned in

to practical action has understood the most effective method for a very long time.

Now, we know from the lab process that the first stage in the Great Work is the 'philosophic' death of our crude matter. In the lab this means the plant or metal we are working on, and in the inner work it means the novice candidate or the alchemist himself. This death first manifests as the extraction of the 'Soul' and 'Spirit' from the Body. The same thing happens in the inner work. In the lab tradition the Soul and Spirit are called the King and Queen. We also know that in Qabalistic psychology they have the same name (Meleck and Malkah). In Qabalistic psychology the Queen is the Nephesch, and the King is the Ruach, so the first step in the inner alchemical work is to separate and define these two mental functions. Because in the average, normal, human these functions are roughly thought of as being part of one unit (you, the living individual) the amorphous chaos of the average mind.

So we also know from experience that our Nephesch and Ruach (as living intelligent parts of our mind) actually exist in our unconscious. That is, even though we can be aware of our feelings (Nephesch), and hear our thinking (Ruach), we can't 'see' these two intelligences as they exist in their native condition ... thus they exist in our unconscious.

But we also know, now, that if our mind uses our imagination to 'dress up' these things that exist in the unconscious, in forms borrowed from memory, which are symbolic of the real nature of Ruach and Nephesch, we can experience them symbolically (visually) as intelligent beings. So we can go in to our imagination, in mediation, mock-up an imaginary scene and 'call' our Nephesch and Ruach out of the unconscious, in to the sub-conscious (imagination), and not only see, smell, taste, hear and feel them, but also communicate with them.

We can actually have a dialogue with the two intelligent functions which make up the primary halves of our mind, which together make up the almost complete package of our living (incarnate) personal psychology. In this way, just as we can do physically in the lab, we have now *extracted* our 'King' and 'Queen' from out of the Chaos of the Elements (unconscious - Anima Mundi), and have separated them and 'contained' them.

This process is Philosophic in that it is entirely unnatural, in the sense that nature keeps these functions hidden in the unconscious (mostly). So to draw them out, separate and define them, and then begin a direct dialogue with them, is an act of art and of science. Because this situation is unnatural, and is a species of decomposition of the personality (lower functions), it also rouses the attention of the Nachash.

Now we need to remember that the Nachash is the intelligence that governs and maintains the faculty of division. The binary function. If we now think seriously about that, it means the Nachash is also the intelligence that 'is' death. Because separation is death. So it is only natural that as soon as we grasp and separate Nephesh and Ruach, the Nachash is going to turn up.

At this point, then, we are in 'actual' practical terms standing before the Gate of the Threshold to the Ancient Mysteries. That is, we have attempted to cross that Threshold (the line between the conscious and unconscious) by using the Imagination to pull something out of the unconscious (our Nephesh and Ruach), and examine them. This violates the mandate of the Nachash, who will now wait to see how likely it is that this violation will become a problem, and then he will himself turn up, demanding that we present the 'keys' to the Gate, and if we cannot, the Nachash will use all of the powers nature has provided it with to turn us back.

The idea of presenting the Keys to the Gate is a symbollic statement. It will do us no good to simply go in to our imaginary inner world and pretend we are offering keys to the Guardian, and hope it will actually open this metaphysical Gate. The 'concept' of the 'Keys' represents something that the initiate must now do ... an 'action' ... which will give him real access to the actual content of the unconscious, this making him an hermetic initiate proper.

Once Nephesch and Ruach (the 'Principal' Elements) are successfully extracted from the unconscious, separate and well defined, we can then separate out the Neschamah and Chiah, in symbollic form, and we then have all four Alchemical 'inner' Elements separated and defined out of the Chaos (unconscious). This is the end of the first stage of the Great Work, as we know from the laboratory process, which follows exactly the same method.

As we know from the lab tradition, the next stage in the Great Work is to take the Elements of the crude matter, now separate, and purify them. I am not going to describe this part of the process, partly because that explanation is complex, technical and lengthy. Also, because I don't want to create a situation that entices anyone to experiment with this process. So in the next essay I am going to jump directly to the final stage of the work ... the chymical wedding, where the purified Elements are merged and made a permanent unit, from which the state of Illumination emerges.

I think I have supplied enough information here, thusfar, for anyone who is following the story closely to recognise there is indeed a direct correspondence between the lab and the inner works of alchemy, that the foundation concepts of the inner work are laid out in Qabala, and that the method of the inner work as I have described it is viable.

So if I have managed to convey that idea, then, now, let us look at the end of the process. How to we attain unity of mind, and what is that unity like ...?

ESSAY FOURTEEN

The Third Stage of the Work - Unification

No matter what we think we know about the goal of alchemical initiation ... Spiritual Illumination, the reality is that it is something we are highly unlikely to have any realistic idea about. We may say we want it, and that this goal is the most important thing in our life, but the truth is we are making this claim about something we have no conscious understanding of, and it is a thing few people dare to discuss, especially to the point where an accurate technical grasp of the subject is possible.

Spiritual Illumination is not human. No matter how many people you interact with in your life, chances are you will never meet someone face-to-face who has attained that state. Even if you do, it is highly unlikely you will find yourself in a position where they will describe it to you, so that you can number amongst the few individuals alive who have some degree of realistic understanding of what that state is.

Spiritual Illumination is a state which exists beyond the common human condition. Therefore it is part of the unknown.

In order to fully manifest a state of Illumination in our mind we need to first merge the two poles of our lower psyche more than fifty percent. More than fifty percent because in order for the process to gain momentum, and to continue to work forward toward full Illumination we need to have established a conscious and deliberate 'majority share' in the functioning of our mind. While any other intelligence within us might have the majority share, or we have less than the majority ourselves, our mind and our life is being governed by forces that very likely are working outside of the Great Work ... the process for attaining full Illumination. The way we obtain that majority share is by

gaining control over our Nephesch and our Ruach, the two poles of the incarnate psyche, and of turning their attention away from an obsessive and limited focus on normal life, to a concerted focus on the accomplishment of Great Work. This is not an easy task. Not only do most people not have any idea about a technique through which this might be accomplished, but we cannot forget that Nephesch and Ruach (the functions which almost entirely govern our instinct, feelings and thinking processes) have also been programmed by nature to remain firmly focused on the struggle of common life. So even to successfully begin to 'think' along lines that have a potential to lead to Higher cognition, is to swim against the powerful current of nature.

Once we have gone against our human nature, by turning the attention of Nephesch and Ruach 180 degrees in the opposite direction from that which nature has ordained for them, only then have we begun the journey back to Unity.

The first step in that process is the death of the 'human' personality, the grasping and separating of Nephesch and Ruach. In doing this we evoke the intelligence of death (Nachash), which we then, too, need to take hold of and gain control over. Because without gaining control of the Nachash, we do not control the process of death, and our matter will not die, putrefy, and be reborn ... philosophically.

Once the process of death has been effected perfectly, and the Elements of our being have been duly overcome by it, the next stage of the process is to purify each Element of the dark matter which clings to them, and which causes them to maintain our full immersion in binary existence. The state of Unity cannot be achieved, and Spiritual Illumination real-ised, until the physical and non-physical impurities which maintain duality still cling to 'our matter' (the functions of our subjective and objective minds).

In the inner alchemical work, once the purification of Nephesh and Ruach has been effected thoroughly, the process of wedding the King and Queen can begin. Until that purification has been achieved, any attempt at wedding the poles of the lower functions will result in a homogeneous state that contains dysfunction that cannot easily be removed. This work of purification has its origin in the earlier establishment of a link between Neschamah (imagination) and conscious awareness (Ruach). This link allows the Neschamah to influence the lower functions, causing them to recognise the Higher Functions and to accept that the Great Work of bonding with them is a valid and productive process. For some people reaching this point can take years. For others, an enthusiastic and productive connection with the Higher Functions can take only months. It all depends on the student's degree of commitment, and their level of intelligent application to the process.

Once that link with the Neschamah is reasonably well established the student will recognise that a number of key things about their approach to life begin to change dramatically. Their understanding of what reality is, and how it functions, begins to transform. Old ideas that are part of the "average person" cliché, about what the world is and how you should approach it, begin to drop away, and are replaced by new ideas which are distinctly of a rarer kind, and belong to a more hermetic and alchemical view of existence. Old behaviours which have been picked up along the way, as we journey through normal life, are re-evaluated, and many of them dropped, being replaced by new behaviours which are grasped as being part of a paradigm that aids in shifting us Higher on the path to Unity. The overall focus also shifts away from the common and temporal struggle for survival in everyday life, toward concern about the health of our connection with the part of us which is eternal. This develops increasingly as the student's link with the Neschamah provides access to realisations about how the common struggles of life can be

managed in an almost automatic manner, allowing that level of our existence to virtually look after itself - stress free. This tends toward increasing the students free time (the time outside of maintaining the struggle for survival in the world), and fills that increased free time with more and more productive activities that aid in one's Higher development.

Instead of having a good deal of one's limited spare time focused on activities that contribute nothing to personal growth, such as the near-obsessive television viewing many people are addicted to, that spare time becomes divided in to activities such as reading, study, further education, self observation, mediation, lab work and socialising and networking with other people who have similar interests ... all at increasingly intense levels of productivity. It is important to understand I do not mean, here, the kinds of activities we see at the popular level of esoteric involvement, which, when looked at objectively, are in fact often little more than a new brand of the same old time wasting activities. I refer specifically to increased involvement in activities which in fact do help in personal growth, with increasing effectiveness and speed.

This kind of growth, though, brings with it, its own kinds of problems. If it is not managed properly then a species of fear begins to arise. Fear that the focus of one's life is being shifted so much from the 'common' level of behaviour, toward the hermetic Adept level of behaviour, that it is beginning to be noticed by friends and family who might become uncomfortable with what you are doing. All this new focus can sometimes lead to the aspirant making sudden changes to things which have become characteristics other people have long recognised as defining who you are to them. Changes in living conditions and location. Changes in employment. Changes in love relationships (such as marriage), can all occur not only suddenly and without warning to outsiders, but also in rapid succession ... as the initiate makes what he sees are adjustments to his life necessary to his attaining the kind of

lifestyle most conducive with fitting in all the kinds of personal activities that he is excited about being involved in, because of the positive effects they are having on his existence. Because outsiders do not have the privilege of thinking with the Higher Functions, as our initiate does, these new and often extreme choices can seem irrational ... which, of course, in the limited picture, is true.

If, during this stage of the work, the student starts to look back at his old life, and the people who came along with that package who themselves are entrenched in that style of existence, and begins to feel there might be some value in remaining at that level of existence themselves, then the fear of change can become dramatic. It can even lead to anxiety attacks and in extreme cases paranoia. If the student allows pressure from his old life to gain the upper-hand, and thereby let the fear of change and fear of the journey into the unknown to continue unchecked, then the most likely outcome will be that the link to the Higher Functions will be killed off. Once this condition sets in, and the ability to 'think' with the Higher Functions is retarded, then the individual discovers that once again it is easy to find good 'reason' to go back to the old life as part of the common human herd, and argue in his own mind that the search for Higher self-expression is not only a fantasy, but probably dangerous. If this condition sets in, and gains momentum, the journey of initiation ends. The Nachash wins the battle, and always in such a way that it ensures that never again will the individual become involved in any esoteric practice that has the ability to evolve him toward an Illuminated state.

But if the fear of breaking away from the herd-life is experienced, managed and overcome, (which is where the experience and skill of an expert teacher comes into its own), then the final stage of the Great Work manifests. In this final (and third) stage 'thinking' with the Higher Functions gains the upper hand, as the student learns to place his trust in this new

mode of cognition, and to remove his trust from the limited view that is had by the lower functions. Then, as this new state of behaviour gains momentum an entirely novel condition appears on the horizon of the psychological life of the initiate. The summit of human experience, the intelligence we know as The Higher Genius, joins the other newly developed aspects of the initiate's psyche. This event gives the aspirant access to the part of themselves that knows *everything* about what they are. There is nothing that the Higher Genius doesn't know about the initiate, his past, his present and his future options. The Higher Genius is an absolute expert in knowledge of the entire functioning of reality. In this way the Higher Genius governs every aspect of the aspirant's existence, molding and modeling his reality constantly in order to guide his life's path in the direction which is understood to be the most productive. The Higher Genius is the consummate Master Alchemist, who also has wide contact with all manner of expressions of reality which exist outside of the strictly human spectrum of experience.

Once a connection is made with the Higher Genius, and a condition is established which allows that connection to remain permanent and functional, the initiate can truly be said to have attained a state of ... "awareness of the totality of his being" ... full Spiritual Illumination. Because there is no nook or cranny in the initiate's existence which the Higher Genius cannot look in to, and does not have a complete understanding of, and control over. This is, then, the beginning of the wider journey of the Illuminated Adept. The true beginning of his adventure as a Master Alchemist, capable of manipulating any aspect of his reality, in conformity with the laws of nature, in order to achieve swiftly and effectively, whatever his will desires.

This is the condition, which speculative alchemists call ... the (internal) Philosopher's Stone. A state where the 'matter' of the alchemist himself not only has been transmuted, in order to create him as a the Lapis Sapientiae (Stone of the Wise), but also has made him the agent of transmutation, capable of

taking what crude matter he desires, and swiftly and effectively converting it into the highest expression of itself. He not only possesses the Stone internally, but if he desires, externally. Wherein he is not only capable of transmutation of base metals in to noble metals, but base humans into noble humans.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

Novices, Adepts and Masters

Lets now start to take a bit of a look at the more distant background of the subject of alchemy itself. Because without a reasonable understanding of where alchemy came from, how it was studied, taught and developed, and who was interested in (historically), it is easy to make all kinds of fantastical claims about alchemy today, that have no foundation in fact. So I believe that the more we understand about the past, where alchemy is concerned, the less likely we are to be fooled by the mistakes or deliberate misinformation of others, today ... of which, all through history, the Masters of alchemy have warned us to beware.

I think the best place to begin with a consideration of the history of alchemy, is to look at the kinds of people who were involved in its study and practice.

As a more detailed source of reference on this subject I highly recommend A.E.Waite's "Lives of the Alchemical Philosophers". There was also a similar publication, but much older, produced by the infamous Francis Barrett (author of "The Magus"), which I think can be found online as a free etext.

As with most things alchemical, there are a lot of mistaken views on just what the old alchemists really were. In modern times, too, much sensationalism about the collective view of these individuals is encouraged, in order to build up a picture of them which is designed to 'sell' a particular kind of 'spiritual' attitude about alchemy, altogether. When the truth is that many of the people who, in the past, were obsessed with or aggressively interested in alchemy were thieves, liars, fakers, con-men, capitalists, kidnappers, murderers and pirates (in the

modern sense of that term). Alchemy doesn't have 'bad press' in the popular mind without reason.

For virtually the entire length of the history of alchemy, as we have access to it today, the individuals who could be collectively viewed as having been involved in some aspect of alchemical work could be roughly grouped in to three categories.

Firstly, and consisting of the greatest number of individuals, are those who largely, or solely, had a pecuniary interest in alchemy. That is, they were involved in its study and practice, or patronised it, primarily for capitalist purposes. They saw it entirely as a source of income or of wealth.

Secondly, there were those individuals who had some interest in things esoteric, outside of alchemy, who came to alchemy as an adjunct to whatever else of an esoteric nature they were involved in.

Thirdly, there are those individuals whom I usually refer to as 'esoteric' alchemists, who alone were focused on alchemy as their primary Spiritual path.

The second and third categories made up, by a huge margin, the smallest percentage of people who have historically been interested in alchemy. Today it is a common practice, for people who believe they have a spiritual approach to alchemy (and would like us to believe they belong to one of the last two categories), to encourage those who have a less well-developed grasp of the history of alchemy, to paint a picture that makes it look like the categories I have listed above were in fact the other way around. That is, that the vast majority of alchemists had esoteric goals and interests, and that those who only came to alchemy in search of money were in the minority.

Where the first category is concerned, we find such people in the past as Kings, Religious Potentates, Nobles, gangsters, apothecaries, miners, metal smiths, physicians, and university professors (for example) who studied alchemy, or who paid for or forcibly constrained the services of alchemists, primarily because they wanted gold, or the legendary healing properties of alchemical medicines, which they could in turn sell for money. Some, such as university professors, who taught the subject, did so to earn wages (not necessarily because they had an interest in alchemy itself, *per sae*), and the universities themselves offered instruction in alchemy primarily as an aid to industry, and therefore to further the common desire to financially capitalise from alchemy.

In cases where alchemists of the first category were interested in astrology or qabala or possibly even magic, and therefore we might assume from this that such interests might place these individuals in another category, one more esoteric and spiritual, we need to remember that for the greater part of history disciplines such as astrology were considered not to be 'esoteric', as such, but were viewed as mainstream sciences, and were commonly employed by people who had not the slightest interest in a spiritual view of reality. At the same time many people who practiced alchemy would study subjects such as qabala and magic because they realised that some of the secrets of alchemy were hidden in books on these subjects, and possibly in their practice. So to find an alchemist studying qabala or magic did not automatically mean he had an interest in those arts, of themselves, for spiritual reasons. It could just as well mean that he saw them as a necessary annoyance to getting what he required to make gold, or to extend his longevity.

Indeed, the oldest surviving texts we have on primitive 'chemistry' (as opposed to real alchemy), come from Egypt. While these texts are often referred to as primitive alchemy by academics, and it is quite possible that the industry that arose

around their use had its roots in real alchemy, these old texts are mostly concerned with blatantly faking precious gems and metals, also with the production of cosmetics, glass, pottery, and non-alchemically produced medicines and various aspects of metalurgy. Therefore, they, as a genre of chemical texts, belong to the category of commercialism and industry and to popular medicine. Not to the category of real alchemy ... since they lack all the characteristics which define something as being alchemical.

In this way, over centuries of people having a commercial or profit-making interest in alchemy, constantly focusing on the 'chemical' side of alchemy, much knowledge which has a commercial benefit only has been lumped under the banner of 'alchemy' simply because the people who discovered and commercialised these aspects of chemistry learned the basic ideas they required to make their discovery from the real alchemists themselves. Over the centuries, many useful and some amazing knowledge has grown out of alchemical knowledge, but itself it is not necessarily alchemy. So at one time many people who were in fact not alchemists at all (because they really had little idea about what alchemy really was), were called alchemists and accepted as such, simply because they had a relationship with alchemical knowledge and practice. To call such a person an alchemist is analogous to calling a lay Christian a priest simply because he read the bible and prayed. But eventually, as the modern sciences of chemistry and physics were born out of alchemy, we no longer called those people alchemists, who are really chemists, industrialists, engineers, physicists and opportunists of various kinds.

With all of this in mind, and the understanding that for most of history (and even today), the vast majority of people interested in alchemy were not really alchemists (in the esoteric sense), what, then, defines a 'real' alchemist?

In order to begin to understand this question we first need to be aware of what defines 'alchemy' itself. We need to remember that alchemy concerns itself with a process, a mechanism, that universally exists in every department of nature. That a real alchemist is someone who understands this, and who is studying alchemy in order to further that understanding. His desire is to know nature more intimately, because he knows that in doing so, he will also come to Know the Divine in nature, which is Itself responsible for the universal mechanism of alchemy. One of the reasons we know that this is what defines alchemy, and therefore what defines the true alchemist, is because the old Masters of alchemy insisted that in order to grasp an accurate and indepth understanding of what alchemy really is, one had to first be 'initiated' (to be trained by an expert) ... that is, to have the link between their lower mind and their higher mind opened up and maintained. So at the heart of alchemy was not simply a practice of working in the lab and trying to figure of the recipes of other alchemists, and of natural mechanisms, by empirical experiment (that is just chemistry and physics), but also a spiritual discipline was necessarily attached to the work.

This is how we define a true alchemist. He is someone who first believes, then later recognises, that the Divine placed the alchemical mechanism in to nature, and spread it universally through every living system, to govern over nature for the purpose of driving it to express its full potential, and thus reach its own perfection. In other words, alchemy was designed as the 'means' of carrying out the Divine will. Then, that an alchemist desires to understand this mechanism for the sole purpose that he wants to align himself with that plan as closely as he can, on the premise that in doing so he will have found a position in the bigger scheme of things which is the most pleasing, most comfortable and more importantly, the most productive he can manage.

(It is important to recognise that the schema is to first *learn* what the divine plan is, and then to become part of it, not to first *assume* you know what the Divine plan is, and attempt to find some means of making your assumption a reality through some esoteric practice).

Whether or not the real alchemist, on his alchemical journey, discovers and exploits anything that has an industrial, commercial or otherwise financially profitable use, is not his intention or goal. Whereas, for those in the first category this is most certainly the goal and intention of their focus. For the real alchemist the goal is always 'Understanding' (in the esoteric sense).

It is curious to note, when we look back over the history of alchemy, and at those individuals who's involvement in the Hermetic Science has survived on record, that virtually no record survives of anyone achieving the summum bonum, the Stone of the Philosophers, and the Elixir Vitae, who's only interest was ultimately financial. We simply don't read of gansters, robber Kings and Priests, industrialists, chemists and other kinds of men who have only a financial interest in alchemy, achieving the prime goal of the science. While it most surly must have happened (there is always an exception to any rule), I can not off the top of my head think of a single case where such a person has succeeded.

On the contrary, when we read the works of individuals who wrote about the alchemical Great Laboratory Work, and who claimed success, in virtually every case these men were esoteric alchemists, who were very pious (spiritually), and who often spoke out against the 'puffers' (chemists) and those who approached alchemy with anything other than a sense of the sacred. A good read of a volume such as 'The Hermetic Museum' (by A.E.Waite), which is considered a choice collection of some of the most respected Hermetic Alchemical texts, which have survived to our time, ... two things become

very obvious to the reader. Each text is written by someone who is either known to have had the Stone of the Wise, or who claimed to have had it. Then, at the same time, every one of the alchemist authors in that compendium makes some kind of allusion to the rightful place of a spiritual attitude when dealing with the study and practice of alchemy. There isn't one case in that volume of anyone without that attitude, of anyone who is simply interested in alchemy for its material gains, or of anyone who insists that the study of alchemy can be successful for materialist and Spiritually minded individuals alike.

When we read about such ideas as the teaching of alchemy in universities, and of the formation of Medieval guilds for the preservation and teaching of alchemical ideas ... these are primarily instances of the bending of true alchemical understanding for industrial and commercial means. The few Medieval alchemical guilds that did exist, served little other purpose (by those who formed and maintained them), than to aid industry. In the same way that the stonemason's guilds were also created to serve industry. It is true that in much later history 'speculative' (philosophic) interests in alchemy and in masonry developed out of the guild system, but that was not in any way the intention of the original establishments of guilds. Their goals originally were not esoteric, and in saying that it would be wrong to confuse 'religious' patronage with esoteric concerns.

Those alchemists who belonged to the second and third categories of practitioners, who had an esoteric interest in the subject, had another approach to preserving and teaching alchemy altogether. To begin, they insisted, with a common voice, that true alchemy was not for the masses, and therefore not a public institution, and not of public concern. Esoteric alchemists took students rarely, sparingly, and were very choosy who they accepted. This wasn't because they guarded their knowledge jealously, but because they knew from experience that very few people really wanted the 'actual' truth

about alchemy, while at the same time being of such a character to be capable of Understanding that truth. They knew that the vast number of people in the world were so intensely focused on the daily struggle for survival, that anything they applied themselves to was automatically turned into a means of directly aiding that struggle. If it couldn't serve that end, then what value did it have? They also knew that it took a very special kind of person, and a rare kind, to devote their life to something because of the possibility that it will ultimately only benefit their spiritual life, without concern that their devotion might cause difficulty in their material life. Where the common person is concerned, assurance of material safety usually precedes any concern for spiritual health. When this is the case then the forces which govern material life eventually dictate the rules of the game, and define the outcome of the enterprise.

This is, of course, a completely understandable and acceptable situation, in its own sphere.

So those who have studied alchemy from an esoteric point-of-view ... those who have been initiated into an accurate esoteric view ... (as opposed to those who simply use esoteric terminology, like a parrot repeats adverts because his cage sits next to the television) ... have always been in the vast minority. They have always chosen their students with care and attention, and sparingly, admonishing them to promise to guard their knowledge from abuse, and to keep the keys to alchemical secrets out of the hands of those who would degrade and abuse them for material gain. They never solicited students, and never charged them for their training, because, as any true Adept knows from experience, a man who needs someone else's money in order to practice or teach the art, has not reached a point of mastery over the machinery of life, and thereby has also not learned that nature takes care of those who have actually unveiled her mysteries. A man who therefore requires financial remuneration for passing on what he claims

is knowledge of alchemy, is a man who has not yet reached the stage where he has himself significantly benefited from such knowledge, but instead still relies on common and materialistic means to sustain his interest.

I make point, not because I believe that insisting on a fee for the exchange of alchemical knowledge is wrong. I don't believe it is wrong. Each man to his own. But I do insist that we should be careful to grasp the difference between knowledge that has a commercial benefit, and that which could not be sold simply because it is not a commodity. There is a distinct and important difference in these two types of alchemical knowledge, and often the one we are attracted to defines what our intentions are, and where our focus is. With absolutely all due respect, how many people do we know who have attained the serious goal of alchemy, who began their search based on the rationale that, in order to make serious (Spiritual) headway one first must take what one has learned and earn a wage from it? This isn't a polite topic of conversation, but it is a serious matter for consideration when we are new to alchemy, and are serious about its esoteric aims and are placing our hopes on a need for it to fulfil or struggle for spiritual emancipation.

True initiates never relied on public institutions to support the preservation and passing on of their knowledge, knowing that from time immemorial the Adepts of the esoteric stream have always taken care of their own concerns. Indeed, they have almost entirely practiced their art and science in private (away from the public eye), and when they succeeded in their work many of them took to a nomadic and reclusive lifestyle, choosing to become hermet' (hermits) for good reason.

While many of the true alchemists from the ancient and classic eras were outwardly religious men, it doesn't take a scholar to recognise that there is a theme which underlies their religious thought that is decidedly uncommon, and possesses a depth that we don't find anywhere in popular religion. These

men made a habit of seeking out the company of their peers, and in secret, and often undertook long and hazardous journey's in order to learn essential knowledge from known Masters. They rarely spoke of the person's who gifted them accurate knowledge of the Great Work, preferring to adhere to the tradition of maintaining silence concerning the chain of transmission, and the circles they moved in which had access to reliable Understanding. There are no examples from history of large institutions, who filled their ranks with many students, turning out alchemists by the dozen who had attained the summit of the work. Likewise, there is no historic support for the popular idea that alchemy is designed to help the masses escape the not so pleasant side of everyday life. On the contrary, we know quite clearly that understanding alchemy and success in its Great Work have always been the privilege of a select few.

In later history, toward the period of the renaissance, individuals who were involved in alchemy were often referred to, or referred to themselves, by three various titles. Eventually these titles become publicly known and are, today, commonly used at the popular level of Western esoteric study, in a way that is quite unrelated to their original usage. New students of alchemy, who were obligated to study under an expert, were often referred to as Novices or Zelators, and sometimes as Apprentices (although that term comes largely from the exoteric guild system). The expert who trained a Novice was most often referred to as an Adept, a word which means 'expert'. It defines someone that while he has a very good knowledge and experience of alchemy, and Hermetism in general, has not as yet Mastered the work. An Adept was still intensely pre-occupied with his alchemical research, and thus often required a 'hand', to help him tend the ovens and furnaces and to take care of back breaking labourious work. Therefore the Adept was usually the best individual suited to teaching Novices. At the summit of this system are the Master Alchemists. They rarely teach, because they are preoccupied with dealing with

matters that stem directly from the Knowledge they have attained from their fully Illuminated state of mind. An Adept alchemist 'technically' becomes a Master alchemist only once he has confected the Philosopher's Stone himself, and proved its effectiveness by transmuting base metals in to noble metals. It has become common today to bestow (or to assume) the title of Master alchemist for all kinds of purposes which have nothing at all (or little) to do with actual alchemy. One of the most popular rationale's for doing this leans on the argument that to succeed (to some degree) in Spiritual alchemy is also a measure of a Master Alchemist (while this may be true to a point ...) ... but I would insist, if such a degree of inner transformation has been achieved by someone who has assumed or had bestowed upon him the title of Master Alchemist, what use is that state of mind to any alchemist who then cannot use it to produce the physical Stone, and Elixir, and thereby to end all and any argument that Mastery may not have been achieved Spiritually?

Why would any 'alchemist' in his right mind, not want the Stone and the Elixir, if indeed he had the level of expanded awareness that allowed him to 'know' definitely how it was accomplished? Such an individual is surly not an alchemist at heart, but some other kind of spiritual aspirant? In this way the true Adept is more than capable of proving he is an expert in the science of Hermes, because he has the ability to prove it empirically by demonstrating any of the many feats of spiritual or laboratory expertise that legend has always ascribed to such individuals. In the same way the Master alchemist needs no certificate to inform himself or others of his assumed level of attainment ... because he carries the proof of his Mastery over life, and death, everywhere he goes, and can demonstrate his skill to anyone he so chooses, irrefutably.

Would we mock nature, or the Divine intelligence who placed at her heart the mechanism responsible for the evolution of the entire universe, and everything in it, by making claims

concerning a knowledge of that science which we do not in fact possess? Or should we approach the Threshold of natural Wisdom with humility, and hope that we prove well prepared for acception, and entering-in?

ESSAY SIXTEEN

History - The Three Ages of Alchemy

What can we learn from the history of alchemy that might be a help to us when deciding what our personal approach to the subject might be?

When considering the major changes that have occurred in the development of alchemical knowledge, I like to divide that history in to three ages: The Ancient Era, The Classic Era and the Modern Era (see attached diagram).

The ancient era is defined by a lack of knowledge of mineral acids. That is, the so-called 'strong acids' of old alchemy - Sulphuric acid, Hydrochloric acid and Nitric acid. Historically we do not know of anyone having discovered, and therefore using, mineral acids, before the famous Arab alchemist Jabir Hayyan (circa 800AD).

On this basis we might then assume that before Jabir, any alchemist experimenting in his laboratory, when using solvents, only had access to relatively weak organic solvents such as acetic acid (from vinegar) and ethanol (alcohol, from fermented sugars), and relatively weak alkali such as tartar (potassium carbonate from the ashes of calcined plant matter).

This is a more important factor than most students of alchemy might recognise without some serious consideration. If you think about this situation - if any alchemist, before Jabir, had produced the Philosopher's Stone, and/or the Elixier Vitae, that means he did so without having had access to strong mineral acids. That is, the solvents he likely used were organic, and/or weak alkalis. This means his method would be more simple (methods using strong acids are often complicated), safer (methods using strong acids are often more potentially

dangerous), and when we try to figure out what type of 'path' alchemists used before the discovery of mineral acids, the number of possibilities are greatly narrowed.

And for my interest, of course, this makes consideration of the Acetate Path significant (since it is the Path I am most interested in).

When thinking in this way about the ancient era, which I also refer to as the 'organic' era, and its use in planning an approach to alchemy, another factor must be considered. All people who come to the study of lab alchemy have (roughly) one of three attitudes to the legendary claims about the ultimate goals of the lab process. (1) they don't believe the Stone (and/or elixir) has ever been found, that its just a 'hopeful' theory, or (2) they believe the Stone has been obtained, but not until strong acids were discovered (and that before then it was only a theory), or (3) the Stone was discovered, and alchemists had it far back into history, well into the ancient era.

I base this division on my observation of people discussing their beliefs about the legendary claims of alchemists. Some people insist the claims were never realised and can never be realised, but they study alchemy simply as an academic or scholarly pursuit. Adam McLean (for example), who owns the well known 'alchemywebsite' has this opinion. Other people do not believe that alchemical transmutation is possible, but believe in the elixir. Rubellus Petrinus has voiced this opinion on his alchemy yahoo group in the past. I have seen a number of people who have largely a modern scientific approach to alchemy (which is called 'archemy'), who insist nobody has performed a transmutation in the past, because they lacked the necessary technology, but that they believe now in modern times it might be possible. Then you have what I believe is probably the largest group, those individuals who believe that we can't just insist that every single claim ever made about transmutation is either a deliberate lie, or the result of ignorance

or delusion. So they believe that if even one person has succeeded in the past, then it is likely more than one person has. I also think that ... without probably having given it much serious thought ... the larger portion of this last group likely accept that alchemical transmutation was effected in ancient times.

So, for the record, I stand in this last group. On the basis of this reason, for me, this understanding of the three eras of alchemy is significant, because if transmutation happened in the ancient era, then it was achieved by simple, organic and relatively safe method(s), and that (of most curiosity) the theory they had about how the Stone can be made, and transmutation effected, must also be a very simple concept. At the same time, if this is the case, and we know that later methods making use of strong mineral acids are harder to understand (from the cryptic explanations alchemists left us of the methods they used), then the earlier methods might be easier to come to an understanding of, and safer to work. They may also be easier and cheaper to work. This could be significant when we consider how much money alchemists have wasted on experiments that led nowhere, in the past, and how much time can be wasted in trying to solve the enigmas of complicated methods.

Once mineral solvents were discovered (and I will be discussing later just how this happened, and one of the methods that were used to make them), the whole realm of alchemical research changed dramatically. This second era I call the classic era, and it is the period of history which starts just before the dawn of the Western European alchemical tradition, and extends right up to the time when the first efforts were made by the likes of Sir Robert Boyle to establish the methods of modern science. So the classic period contains all of that history of alchemy from the dawn of the Western tradition to the dawn of modern science. This period is defined by both the discovery and use of strong acids and alkalis, and

also by many 'chemical' discoveries made by people who were involved with practicing lab alchemy in one way or another. Discoveries like new methods for making strong solvents, new metals and minerals, new properties of chemicals, new methods of producing better lab equipment and the development of more useful lab glassware (for example). We also find, during the classic period, the appearance of more individuals who had a more obviously serious systematic analytical and chemical approach to alchemy.

The third era I call the secular era (also the atomic era), because it is dominated by individuals who have a more scientific (in the modern sense) approach to alchemy, and also by individuals who have a very atheist approach to the subject. This is an important factor to consider about the era we live in, because when we look at the alchemical community in general, and consider the kinds of people who are active in it, especially those who are actively talking about their opinions on the subject, whether their approach is alchemical (in the traditional sense) or chemical, and whether they have a spiritual or atheist view of the work, has a huge impact on how they see alchemy, and how they form their beliefs and approach to the work. Often it is very hard to tell what someone's approach is until they openly state their position. Especially with people who are prominent in the alchemical community. It is easy to assume because they contribute a lot to the general body of alchemical activity, that they believe in the basic tenets of the Hermetic Science, and possibly that they even have an esoteric approach to the work. Often, though, this is might not be the case at all. Which can be a bit of a shock, and disillusioning, for some new students.

It is also important from the point of view of a traditionalist (strictly Hermetic) approach to alchemy, that individuals like myself have. When someone comes to the study of alchemy from a strictly modern scientific or atheist belief system, (no matter what these other approaches might be, for better or

worse), these paradigms are not Hermetic. The original Hermetic Adepts who discovered alchemy, preserved and taught its tenets, also believed in the concept of a Supreme Being, and insisted that alchemy had a spiritual dimension. These men (and women) , who were intelligent to the degree that they could not only discover alchemy, but also succeed in transmutation, would very likely not at the same time be so stupid to believe in a spiritual view of alchemy if such a view was mere primitive superstition. For modern students of alchemy to believe that modern science is superior to the task of succeeding in alchemical transmutation, and that the ancients who founded the Science of Hermetic alchemy were superstitious fools, reeks of arrogance.

It is an increasingly accepted possibility, by modern science today, that the minds of our ancient ancestors were not at all much different than our minds are today. That is, the bulk of humanity have a wide range of mental capability (IQ if you like, but also just common sense and creative ability), today, which range from people who accept and believe in all manner of preposterous things right up to people who are intelligent enough to figure out how to send a rocket to the moon. In ancient times things were likely no different, psychologically, where there must have been individuals alive 6000 years ago who had the capability to think at a similar level to that of a modern Einstein, even if they didn't have the the support of modern technology in order to think 'technologically' (in the modern sense). If this was the case ... what would a man (or woman), with the potential to think like an Einstein, focus that thinking potential on, 6000 years ago? Then, whatever they discovered, ideas that might have been equal in usefulness to the ideas associated with modern technology today, how reliable and accurate might those concepts have been?

Whatever was going on in that vast, and vastly distant ancient era of alchemy is almost entirely lost to us now. Virtually nothing in the way of reliable historic records exists of a lab

tradition, from before the end of the fall of the Western Roman Empire. But there are some things we can make a good educated guess at, and a number of curious things we can know about methods of alchemy that were devised long before strong metallic acids were discovered

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

History - The Lullian tradition

When considering the ancient era of alchemy, just how far back in history could someone have been practicing the laboratory tradition? When answering this question there is one defining factor which is pre-eminant. The requirement of the most basic and necessary laboratory equipment, the distillation apparatus. The earliest and most simple form of which is the alembic.

The European term 'Alembic' comes originally from the Greek 'Ambix' - a conic shaped vase with a small opening. Initially, the Arabs changed the word 'Ambix' to 'Ambic' and called the distillation equipment that derived from the Greek jar 'Al-ambic'. This became the European Alembic (a term still used today by some beverage distillers for their large commercial pot stills).

We know that before borosilicate glass, which is so important to the practice of modern alchemy, the alchemists of the late classic era made use of common glass, often packed about with clay to make it more fire resistant. Before glass, in the early classic era, thin plate metal was forged and beaten, and welded or riveted in to the shapes of simple distillation equipment. In the ancient era (and early classic era) ceramic pottery was the primary medium from which lab equipment was fashioned. In this way ceramics were the oldest known medium we are aware of out of which distillation equipment was fashioned.

According to one authority it is possible that the first attempts at glazing pottery happened in the prehistoric mining and metalworking villages of central or south-eastern Europe around 4000-3000 BC. It is argued that this knowledge reached Mesopotamia and Egypt at around 3000 BC. Archaeologists

also tell us that in Mesopotamia a primitive 40 litre ceramic alembic-style distillation device was discovered that was dated at around 3000 BC. (See attached picture).

The next significant historic mention of distillation occurs at around 200 BC, when Aristotle discusses the distillation of sea water for drinking, and mentions the idea of distilling wine (a practice that isn't discovered in Europe for another 1400 years). At around the same time we know experiment with distillation was relatively well developed, by mention that is made of the alchemical practices of (one of the) Cleopatra(s). In a book known as Cleopatra's Chrysopoeia, drawings are provided of early distillation apparatus that have obviously evolved from the early alembic.

Academic opinion has it that by the time of Cleopatra it is likely that the only things that distillation was used for was the purification of water and the distillation of plant essences and balms. It seems highly unlikely, though, that if the technique of alembic distillation had existed since 3000 BC that in 2800 years (up until 200 BC in Cleopatra's time), nothing more than this distillation of water and plant volatiles was discovered.

All it would take, for example, to discover Isaac Hollandus' alchemical method for the Plant Work, would be for someone during that 2800 year period to place a good quantity of plant material in the curcubit of a ceramic alembic and, with the helmet snugly attached, heat the plant matter until it burns and is reduced to ash. Together, the ash with the distillate of this destructive distillation are the substances which form the basis of the Hollandus process. The only equipment required to complete that process is an alembic and a crucible. It is not unlikely that in this 2800 year period, of people distilling plant oils in alembics, (and god knows what else), that more than one person is going to have left the process running too long, to the point where all the water in the curcubit is distilled away, and the plant matter now dry, combusts, and the special distillate

products required by the Hollandus method would be discovered by accident.

Such a situation would be so likely to happen over such a vast period, that it would be stranger, by far, if it hadn't. All it would take is one curious and skilled distiller to discover the products of the destructive distillation of organic matter, and we would have the first beginnings of an alchemical practice, to be followed, after enough experience, with the first theory of an alchemical process.

In further consideration of just when such a body of knowledge might have arisen, historically, I might make the point that the first mention, in historic record, of the idea of an elixir of long life, prepared from a plant substance, that I am aware of, occurs in the 'Epic of Gilgamesh', which appeared in Mesopotamia over 2500 years before the beginning of the Christian era. Already, 4500 years ago, storytellers were constructing legends, myths and allegorical narratives concerning the possibility (or maybe even the 'knowledge') that it was possible to artificially extend human longevity by extreme measures. If this type of subject was already known publicly 2500 years BCE, so that stories could be created about it, how much longer before that time was knowledge of Elixirs of Life passed on in secret?

One thing leading to another, how long would it be before some curious, skilled and enterprising person discovered the Acetate Path to the Stone? ... which is based on the exact same method as the destructive distillation of plant matter. (I will be discussing how this is possible in a future essay). In consideration of such a question we know that Zosimos of Panopolis (300 AD), the source of the earliest written accounts of alchemy which have survived to our own time, described an alchemist, whom he referred to as Mary the Jewess, having knowledge of the preparation of a transmutation agent prepared from lead (Pb) acetate. If Zosimos' account is accurate, Mary is

likely to have lived around 200 AD, in Alexandria. Thuswise, she was part of the famous Alexandrian period of the mixing of esoteric cultures - between the Jews, Greeks, Egyptians, other Middle Eastern cultures and the Romans.

The next important example we have of someone discussing the Acetate Path comes to us in the person of an individual who called himself Ramon Llull (sic: Raymund Lull, Raymond Lully). Most students of alchemy who have taken care to have a good look at the past history of the subject will have heard of Ramon Llull (ca.1232-1315). It was once claimed that the Llull of alchemical fame is the same Llull who is known to have been a zealous religious (Roman Catholic) evangelist in both Europe and in the Near and Middle East, dedicated to the conversion of Muslims to Christianity. Although it is generally agreed, today, that the individual of religious fame was not an alchemist (in his own writings he rejects the idea of transmutation), and that someone else (or a number of individuals) used Llull's name to publish a good number of respected alchemical texts. From these texts has arisen that which we might refer to as the "Lullian tradition" - a major school of alchemical thought, but one about which little is known or understood in modern day. Most of Llull's works have not been translated into English, but remain in their original Latin. These works, though, have influenced a stream of alchemical researchers and thinkers from the 13th century right down to the present day.

To emphasize the importance of that which was happening at the time when alchemy was migrating from the East to the West (ca.1144 AD), we should also consider that at the exact time when the individual using the name Ramon Llull was practicing his alchemy and recording his results in pseudonymous texts, another Spanish alchemist was also recording his work in woodcut. That individual we know as Arnolds de Villanova, and he is assumed to be the author of the famous engravings we know today as the Rosarium Philosophorum. These woodcuts depict the exact same

alchemical 'system' that Lull described in such cryptic language in some of his writings. The details of the alchemical school based on the destructive distillation of organic matter.

Of much importance to the Acetate Path, and the Lullian school, is the early English alchemist Sir George Ripley (ca. 1415–1490). It is well known that Ripley's main inspiration came from the Lullian canon. He is credited with re-popularizing the ideas of Lull in the resurgence of interest in alchemy that happened in his lifetime. Ripley also began a tradition, in the British Isles, of acetate alchemy, which developed over a long period by his predecessors, and evolved from his own very cryptic and poetic style of discussing alchemic ideas, to become expressions of his knowledge, by other men, that were increasingly more revealing and rational (as opposed to poetic).

Then we have Isaac Hollandus (1572-1610?), possibly the only Western alchemist to clearly point out that a tradition exists in which a plant and a mineral alchemical process exist side-by-side and are based on exactly the same technique. Hollandus was obviously aware of Ripley's method with acetates, as he mentions in English alchemist in his 'Opera Saturni' (his own book on the Acetate Path). But Hollandus might be the only person we know of, who has revealed to us that within the destructive distillation system of alchemy (which I have called the Lullian tradition), the same method has been used in vegetable, animal and mineral alchemical process. This is extremely significant because it points to the possibility of a system of alchemy, previous to Hollandus, and after his time, that was an extremely orderly and unified system, and also kept deeply secret.

Later in history, we find John Heydon (1629 – c. 1667), a prolific English Rosicrucian author, writing on the subject of laboratory alchemy, including the Acetate Path, in which he makes reference to both Mary the Jewess and Raymund Lull as sources of knowledge of this Path.

Johann Segerus Weidenfeld published another well known text (in 1684) which explains much detail of the tradition of destructive distillation of organic substances, in the Lullian tradition. Amongst other authors who support a knowledge of this tradition he frequently quotes both Llull and Ripley.

From this point it would now be helpful to discuss just what it is that forms the basis of the Lullian tradition, and discuss the destructive distillation of organic materials.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

Destructive Distillation

Now let me describe a situation that has never been clearly explained anywhere. A situation that has not been conceived of or known for some few hundred years, at the least. A situation that may have first been discovered and defined more than 5000 years ago, by some individual (or a group of individuals) who first set down the foundation principles of laboratory alchemy.

At some point in history, and it is anyone's guess when, someone realised that when you burn organic matter in a closed system (such as a distillation train - specifically an alembic) you end up with four substances (in this order) :

- (1) water
- (2) a clear volatile spiritus substance
- (3) an oil-like substance
- (4) a residue of black sooty mineral substance

This 'burning' of organic matter (more accurately, its 'decomposition') inside a distillation system is referred to as 'dry distillation' by alchemists, and as destructive distillation or pyrolytic distillation by chemists. As far as I know no matter what the organic matter is that can be decomposed by this process, the same four products are produced (alchemically speaking). But we know from a chemical point of view that the 'oil' produced is not the same chemical composition for every kind of dry distillation. Different organic substances and different temperatures and distillation setups will produce various combinations of organic oil-like molecules in these 'oils'. But to the alchemist of bygone ages, who only had sight, taste,

feel and smell to assess these substances by, the oil-like matter would seem virtually the same for very kind of pyrolytic distillation.

At some point in time, someone looked at the four products of this kind of destructive distillation and founded the idea that all matter (at the least all organic matter) was composed, 'essentially', of four states ... and Hermetic occultists today refer to these four states as the ELEMENTS of matter, or alchemical Elements:

- (1) Water
- (2) Air (the volatile spiritus gas)
- (3) Fire (the oil, which is flammable)
- (4) Earth (the sooty mineral residue)

This is the basis of the system Frater Albertus taught, and you will find an almost identical view of the decomposition of matter into its Elements in Albertus' Plant Work. But this understanding of the alchemical Elements is a superficial level of knowledge. Another level, one step deeper, also exists, and was taught by Adepts of the mineral work to novices who were advancing to Adeptship themselves.

Anyone who is familiar with Greek philosophy will know that modern academics credit a Greek philosopher with the invention of the idea of the four Element system. But serious occultists know that the Greeks were often not in possession of such ideas, first. They gathered together the serious scientific concepts they presented to the modern world from the few men who were educated by the Priests of ancient Egypt. We also know, for example, that the ancient Egyptians already had a knowledge of the four alchemical Elements, at least 1200 years before they taught the idea to the Greeks. Because we can clearly see symbolic glyphs of these concepts in the 'Book of Gates' or the 'Book of the Amduat' (for example), which was

painted so beautifully on the walls of the sarcophagus chamber of King Thutmosis III's tomb.

So I might be stretching the boundaries of acceptable claim here by suggesting that the concept of the four Elements that were included as part of the otherworld theme of the story painted on the walls of Thutmosis' tomb, were once discovered as part of primitive alchemical experiment, but I don't believe that this tenuous claim is without some reasonable basis. If what I suggest is in any way plausible, then it would suggest the idea that a well developed proto-alchemical philosophy, based on (or at the least including), a primitive laboratory practice, was developed before 1500 BCE.

I might stop here and make an important point, in presenting these ideas. That I am not as yet claiming that the concepts devised by this system of thought and philosophy are accurate, in the modern scientific sense. At this stage all I am attempting to claim is that this way of coming to conclusions about alchemy, which form the basis of Hermetic philosophy, was highly likely. Whether these ancient conclusions are true, in that they might explain accurately some realistic paradigm of physics and (al)chemistry (experimentally), and lead to the production of transmutation agents and longevity elixirs, is another matter. First ... let us just simply consider HOW the old alchemists saw the universe, based on the primitive experiments they performed, and the conclusions they drew from those experiments based on sensory observations that did not have recourse to modern analytical technology.

Although I have roughly explained the method of destructive distillation, and its products, previously, let me explain it again, and now make it clear how the plant and the mineral aspects of this process tie together.

Imagine we take fresh plant matter and break it down, and force it into a boiling flask until about half of the flask is packed

full, and then attach this flask to the rest of a distillation train. Then we heat that flask. First water will come over. Then when the plant matter is completely dry, and starts to decompose from the heat, a smoke will arise. This smoke will condense into a clear volatile spirit. Then by-and-by we raise the heat in stages. More white smoke will rise and condense into that clear spirit. Eventually the heat will become so strong, and the 'matter' so depleted of the smoky spirit, that a red fume will start to rise. This red fume condenses into a red oil-like substance.

After a short while that red fume will stop, and the black sooty residue that remains in the boiling flask will give up no more fume. At this point the temperature of the fire will be about 300 to 350 degrees Celsius.

This plant matter has now been reduced to four things by the fire. Water, a volatile clear Spirit, a red oil-like substance, and a black mineral residue.

Now, if we take the oxide of a metal ... such as lead oxide ... and digest it in acetic acid that is about 50 percent water, the acid will dissolve (eat) the metal. That means that some of the acetic molecules will grab lead atoms and bind to them. Then if we distil away the excess acetic acid and water, we will end up with a gum-like substance that contains only the acid which is bound to the metal. This gum is what modern science refers to as a metallic acetate.

If we now place that gum in a boiling flask and heat it, we will see exactly the same result as when we heated pulped plant matter in a closed distillation train. The acetic, which is bound to the metal, and is an organic substance, like our plant pulp, will decompose. Water will rise over the still head. Then a smoke will rise that condenses into a clear volatile Spirit. Then a red fume will rise and condense into a red oil-like substance. When that stage is complete a black sooty mineral residue will remain in the boiling flask.

This is the opening phase of the acetate path to the philosophers stone. The alchemists of the classic era had little or no idea that the substances that came over the still head had their origin in the acid. They observed and assumed the distillate was something that came out of the mineral (metal) itself. The mineral which had (they believed) been reduced to its 'chaos' (primordial liquid), by the action of the acid.

In the final analysis the product of the dry distillation of plants, and the dry distillation of metallic acetates, is almost identical. Albeit that the product of the metallic acetates differs in that it is the result of an organic substance (the acid) being distilled away from, and decomposed from, its metallic bond.

In all of the classic and ancient alchemical literature we have available to us today, only Hollandus makes a like-connection between the plant and the metal/mineral distillations. He doesn't come right out and say it, but if you read his 'opera saturni' (on the acetate process) and his 'opera vegetabile' (on the plant work), and pay attention to what he describes, it is easy to recognise both techniques are virtually the same.

A good number of other author alchemists explain their version of the metallic acetate distillation, but they never mention the a method of manipulating plants that is the same work. The important concept here is that there is a common theme that exists between a way of dealing with plants and a way of dealing with metals and minerals. This idea ... this common method ... is something almost entirely unknown in modern alchemy. When it comes to manipulating plant substances spagyrically, almost all modern students of alchemy use a version of Frater Albertus' method, which while valid, is quite different.

In this way, learning the Hollandus method applied to plants, allows us to accurately understand and experience how the

same method can be applied to minerals and metals (with some slight adjustments).

So what is it about destructive distillation that makes it viable as an alchemical theme? To answer that question we first have to understand what descriptive distillation is, from the view of chemistry and physics.

The easiest example to use is to explain what happens with a metallic acetate, because the molecular structure is more basic. But the same principle works for plant matter.

See the attached diagram. In that diagram you will see two stylised representations of molecules. '1' is acetic acid. '2' is lead acetate. If we take acetic acid and distill it all we get in the receiving flask is acetic acid. The molecule does not break up and produce different substances. But when we take something like lead oxide (which is a mineral powder) and digest it in acetic acid, the acid eats the lead powder and some of the acid bonds to single lead atoms. The result is lead acetate. So you might imagine a large glass jar with a clear liquid ... the acid. We pour enough of the lead oxide into the jar to line the bottom about a finger's thickness. In a few days the clear acid will change colour ... to red or green. This colour is evidence that lead acetate is forming. When about 4 percent of the acid has reacted with the lead, the reaction stops. We filter out the remaining lead powder and are left with our coloured liquid (lets say its green). Next we distill this mixture to remove the acetic acid that didn't react with the lead to produce an acetate. The result of this distillation is that we end up with a clear acetic acid in the receiver, and our green acetate is concentrated and becomes a thick gum. This thick gum is made up of millions of molecules like '2' in the diagram.

Now, it is important to understand that acetic acid is an organic molecule. That is, it is composed of hydrogen, oxygen and carbon atoms. All organic molecules have these three

atoms in various numbers and proportions, as well as sometimes including mineral atoms. So our lead acetate gum in our boiling flask is in a way similar to having a flask full of chopped up dry plant. The main difference is our lead acetate contains only one kind of organic molecule. But the dry chopped up plant we start the Hollandus plant work with is composed of many, many different organic molecules. But at the end of the day, acetate or plant, both can be reduced to just hydrogen, oxygen and carbon, and a few mineral atoms.

If we now continue to heat our metal acetate first any water that is still stuck to some of the molecules wriggles loose under the low heat, and distills away. Then we need to raise the temperature until the acetate starts to decompose slightly. What that decomposition actually is, from the point of view of physics, is that the heat applied to the acetate from our distillation heating mantle over-rides the energy in some of the atoms in the lead acetate molecule (see '3' in the diagram) that bonds those atoms together. This causes this atomic 'bonding' energy, which is like the glue that holds atoms together into the bunches we call molecules, to loosen and break apart. So now we have a kind of soup of loose chunks of molecules and atoms in our boiling flask. When the temperature gets hot enough some of these broken-up pieces escape to surface of the soup and fly up into the atmosphere of the flask. When this happens it looks like a white smoke. This white smoke is actually a miniature cloud of 'ionised' particles (broken up chunks of molecules).

When these ionised particles rise high enough in the flask, then down into the condenser, the temperature there is lower, and so the molecular/atomic bonding energy is not disrupted any longer. This forces the ionised particles to *click* together again, like magnets, to form new organic particles. In this instance, with this first white fume, only one new substance is produced from these recombining ionised particles. When it drips into the receiver it is a clear volatile Spiritus substance.

We raise the heat bit-by-bit and eventually the white fume subsides and a red fume begins. At this end of the ionisation process we no longer are getting just one substance reforming. We are getting several. Anything from about six to sixteen new substances. They form together into what looks like a red oil.

So, I raised the question ... what is the alchemical value in the products of this dry distillation technique? If you have managed to picture in your mind, accurately, the process I have described above, then you should now be able to grasp the answer to this question. By the dry distillation of organic matter the old alchemists possessed a method of creating new substances, with new properties, from common natural organic substances. Depending on what organic substances we are decomposing this way, the distillate products contain variations in molecular substances. The old dry-distillation school of alchemists did a lot of work on investigating these various products, and recorded a lot of detail about what they found out. But the most cryptic passages in their writings are where we find that information. So the thing they were most interested in hiding, was what they discovered about these dry distillation products. Because they learned, amongst other things, that some of the products of specific distilled organic molecules had very unusual properties.

This is the whole motive and importance in this issue of dry distillation, and of the Acetate Path of alchemy.

I might also point out that you don't need acetates to obtain these special substances. As we are discussing here, plant matter itself will provide a number of these products too. At the same time the old alchemists also discovered other ways and other substances that would provide the same results. But ... all of these substances and methods come under the same banner ... that which I refer to as the Lullian school ... or method. The alchemists who followed this school preferred to call this

approach to the Philosopher's Stone ... The (method for the) Vegetable Stone. We assume they used this term because they understood (or some of them did) that essentially this work was 'organic' in nature, and not really based on minerals or metals, despite what some believed and said.

You won't find anywhere, in writing, a more clear and detailed explanation of the mechanics and reasoning behind the Acetate Path.

Ok, so let's take a break from this serious lab talk for a moment, and in the next essay I will discuss an issue related to qabala

ESSAY NINETEEN

Understanding

When considering the aim in esoteric work, from the point of view of those of us who seek Spiritual Illumination before all else, the concept of gaining 'Understanding' is paramount.

Previously I have discussed how the qabalistic Ruach and Nephesch are the same concept as the alchemical King and Queen, in the lab work as well as in the inner work. In both qabala and in alchemy one of the primary themes which underpin the Hermetic philosophy of both disciplines is the dynamic of the Marriage of the King and Queen. (This concept on its own, when closely studied, reveals qabala to be founded on alchemical dynamics, and alchemy to be able to be described, qabalistically).

In order to attain to a state of full Spiritual Illumination the Adept must establish a Unity of mind. In order to attain the Stone of the Wise the Adept must likewise produce a chemical state of Unity in his matter.

Because the foundation of physical reality is a binary mechanism, the state of Unity which the Adept seeks is a reconciliation of the two poles of that binary ... King and Queen, Sun and Moon, Acid and Alkali, Ruach and Nephesch.

One of the ideas which I talked about in relation to the existence of the underlying binary nature of physical reality concerns what I refer to as the S-effect. The S-effect is that force of nature which maintains the binary condition. The thing which sustains the distance that must be kept between the alchemical Sun and Moon, and the qabalistic Ruach and Nephesch. The S-effect achieves this by establishing an antipathy between the poles of the binary, and feeds that

antipathy with anything that will sustain conflict between the extremities of the binary.

In the field of alchemical (that is, esoteric) psychology, whose highest study and practice is of the evolution of the faculties of mind, we learn that one of the key conditions that keeps the Nephesch and Ruach apart is ignorance. Not only ignorance in general, but more importantly ignorance by each other, about each other (sic: Ruach and Nephesch). In the human race the male is the manifestation, in the flesh and in mind, of the universal Ruach principle. Men express the faculty of the Ruach much more than the faculty of their Nephesch, (which is to a greater or lesser degree repressed in them). Women express the faculty of Nephesch much more than the faculty of Ruach, (which is in them repressed to a greater or lesser degree). In this way, men and women being the expression of the two poles of the binary nature in the human species, we should not be surprised that a type of antipathy exists between the genders, and that men and women live in a state of relative ignorance about each other - and that conditions in nature, and this in the world of human behaviour, encourage that antipathy more than they reconcile it.

Likewise, just as men and women are the two poles of the human binary, according to the law of binary function each pole of the binary must be in itself divided. In this way we find that inside every man and every woman exists both Nephesch and Ruach, the Feminine and Masculine poles of the mind. Just as the male and female of the flesh live a life relative to each other that is sustained by some degree of ignorance about what it really means to be the other, so in the mind the two poles of the individual human psyche exist in a constant state of tension, opposition, conflict and ignorance.

Just as the state of opposition at the physical level is maintained by a relative ignorance, so it is that within the individual, at the psychological level, that division is maintained

by a degree of ignorance. By questions we have unanswered in ourselves. By past experiences, the memory of which involves some things which we could not understand. By trauma, which created at one time fear and placed a distance between ourselves and the thing we learned to fear. By beliefs, which, once adopted, cause us to accept one thing over another.

The moment a question arises in our mind, a state of polarity in connection with the question is established between the things we know (or believe we know) and the thing(s) we are ignorant of. The more mysteries life has for an individual, the more deeply entrenched in him is the law of the binary. This in turn forces him to experience a greater degree of internal as well as external conflict ... and the very root of that conflict is always ignorance. A lack of Knowledge, and a lack of Understanding. Because this discomfort in us is something we reject, in preference for comfort (the pleasure principle), we are urged on by our nature to find solutions to the things in life which are a mystery to us.

In reference to this state of affairs the qabala (as the home of the psychological teaching of alchemy), has much to say. But, true to classic esoteric style, it describes the nature of this binary conflict, and its resolution, in the terms of allegory and metaphor, in order to keep the details of that knowledge a secret. In this way few people who study qabala even recognise the existence of this knowledge in the mainstream level of teaching. So let us look closely at what this teaching has to say, and I am sure anyone here who has more than a passing familiarity with the basic teachings of Hermetic qabala will find something in what follows, a revelation.

The subject of alchemical psychology, as it is put forth in Hermetic qabala, begins with the teaching concerning the subject of the 'partzufim'. In my experience, many people who consider themselves serious students of Western Hermetism, and therefore have made a habit of studying qabala, have

either never heard of the term partzufim, or, if they have, are not really sure what it means. In qabala the partzufim are similar to that which in Jungian psychology is referred to as 'archetypes' (of the unconscious). A psychological archetype is a major node in the human psyche which stores a huge amount of knowledge pertaining to one of the primary 'themes' of what it means to be human. So an archetype is like a pattern or blue print, in the mind, that governs an entire category of human behaviour and experience.

In qabala there are six primary partzufim. That is, the old qabalists divided the mind in to six primary functions, or faculties. I have described part of this information previously (see the attached diagram). Three of these partzufim govern the lower mind, which is the part of us which is here incarnate. The part of 'you' that you are aware exists because you experience these pieces of yourself in your daily life.

These three faculties of the incarnate everyday self are:

- (1) The Nephesh (the unconscious mind)
- (2) The Ruach (the conscious mind)
- (3) The Nachash (the tension and opposition you experience)

Everything you are, as an everyday person, can be found under one of these archetypes.

The other three of the partzufim govern your dis-incarnate self. That is, the part of you that exists eternally. I refer to this part of the human condition as the higher functions. The higher functions consist of:

- (1) The Neschamah (the urge to seek balance)
- (2) The Chiah (the ability to seek balance)
- (3) The Yechidah (balance)

Even amongst those who have studied qabala, and are aware of the concept of partzufim, and know them by name,

few understand that these 'entities' are parts of their own mind ... and therefore the that the teaching concerning the partzufim is a body of knowledge concerning esoteric psychology. Many students of the occult who are aware of these 'intelligences' assume that they are something akin to spirits that exist 'out there' in the wider universe. This comes from the fact that a big part of qabala, as it is presented and taught today, focuses on a teaching concerning the various hierachies of celestial being, and of evil intelligences, and of how to manipulate them.

Because few people realise that the partzufim not only exist in the macrocosm (are intelligences in the collective unconscious), but also in the microcosm (are intelligences inside ourselves), the parts of qabalistic teaching concerning the partzufim seem confusing, and are little understood.

It should be easily recognised, when considering the twin triads of the lower and higher functions, that the lower is temporary and divided, and the higher is permanent and revolves around unity.

The higher functions are latent in the vast majority of humans. That is, only a small number of people at any point in time have the ability to real-ise the higher functions working inside them. For most people their entire reality is focused on and relies upon that which the lower functions can provide them with. But for a few rare individuals the higher functions are as real in their lives as thinking and feeling are for the 'average' person. This provides these rare individuals with access to facets of the working of the higher functions such as clairvoyance, and other psychic abilities, as well as a vastly extended ability to 'reason' and 'feel' on a higher level.

So how does an average person open that link with the higher functions?

We know that the lower functions are maintained as the focus of attention and awareness through the faculty of division (the S-effect, which is maintained by the Nachash). Division is maintained through ignorance. Even the most intelligent people alive have some part of human experience of which they are ignorant. Without having 'something' about which we are ignorant, we could no exist here. This dynamic of having pieces of reality about which we are aware, and part of which we are not aware, is embodied in the very nature of ourselves ... in our conscious mind (Ruach) and our unconscious mind (Nepesch). At any one point in time some part of our reality is known by our Ruach (conscious awareness), and some part is unknown by our Ruach, because it is hidden in the unconscious (Nepesch). As long as this state exists, we live in a binary reality. We cannot see outside of it. The very structure of what we are is rooted in this polar condition, with a special partzufim (intelligence) maintaining a metaphorical 'wall' between the two states.

A very long time ago someone, or some group of people, discovered that it was possible to 'look' into the unconscious mind ... through a trick of nature. Somehow it was discovered that it was possible to undermine the function of the Nachash, the intelligence that 'guards' the binary condition. By being able to look into the content of the unconscious it was possible to shift the balance of the binary condition. That is, the more a person learned about what is inside their unconscious, the more 'information' they became consciously aware of. Slowly, over time, a person could shift so much information from the 'hidden' side of themselves to the 'aware' side of themselves, that at a certain 'flash-over point' so much information was in the 'aware' state that a force-to-unity was being established. That is, they were evolving from being a two-thing person to becoming a One-thing person.

This process of taking unconscious content that was hidden in the 'dark' and becoming aware of it, in the 'light' of conscious

awareness, was called (in the Western tradition) ... "Illumination".

In consideration of the mechanics of this process, the situation looks like this ...

Our Neschamah is the lowest level of the higher functions. That is, she is the part of the Higher Functions which is closest to 'incarnation' (physical existence), without actually being a physical entity itself. In this way, when we begin our journey back to Unity, the first 'station' of the higher functions we become aware of in ourselves, is Neschamah.

The bulk of the teaching of qabala revolves around a teaching device known as 'Otz Chiim', the Tree of Life. It is a glyph that is used as a kind of mnemonic device. Anyone who has studied qabala could not but be aware of this device, and its basic attributes (again, see the attached diagram).

The Tree of Life is a glyph made up of 10 spheres (linked by 32 paths). This '10 sphere' version of the Tree is the Tree of an average person's life. This average life is that which the old qabalists called the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That is, living in this physical reality is a school which is designed to teach EVERYTHING about binary nature (sic: euphemistically - good and evil). But when a person has reached the point where they have attained to as full a knowledge of binary nature as they can absorb, a new state evolves inside them, and this new state is symbolised by the addition of an 11th sphere on the Tree. That new 11th sphere is known as Daath, which translates from the Hebrew in to English as 'Knowledge'.

True to the law of binary nature, this 'Knowledge' is twofold. First, the accumulation of Knowledge of good and evil. The 'topping-up' of experience of binary nature, to the point where everything that it is essential to be known about the binary function has been experienced and learned. When that point is

reached, this new condition 'Daath' develops inside the individual.

Secondly, Daath is a special kind of Knowledge which allows the individual to open the link between the lower functions and the higher functions. In this way, Daath 'becomes' the link or bridge. This special Knowledge is, of course, the kind of Knowledge which makes up the 'initiatory' process. It is a Knowledge passed on to the initiate, by his initiator. The kind of Knowledge that allows, in very practical terms, the individual who has reached the end of his accumulation of binary experience Knowledge, to begin his journey back to Unity.

When the individual who has accumulated his full quota of Knowledge concerning binary nature, the state of his Nachash changes. Instead of the Nachash maintaining the binary division of the individual's reality, it begins to weaken, and the gap which that division has maintained slowly grows narrower. This happens, in practical terms, because the Nephesh and Ruach have attained so much experience about binary life that they start to 'Understand' what is going on (in the esoteric sense of Understanding).

Anyone who is sufficiently aware of the teaching of qabala will know that the 3rd sphere of the Tree of Life, which is the station of the Neschamah, is also known as 'Understanding'.

This sphere, the sphere of the faculty of the Neschamah, is the state of mind that evolves when real Understanding about the nature of reality starts to emerge. That is, as Understanding grows, so does the faculty of Neschamah in us, the first stirrings of the Balanced mind in the higher functions. Qabalists also refer to Neschamah as ... the urge to attain Unity. (Often described in more poetic language as ... love for the Divine). In this way, as the Ruach and Nephesh 'Understand' the real nature of reality more intimately, and that 'Understanding' grows, their urge to Unity also grows. As this situation develops

a flash-over point is reached where enough momentum is established in seeking Understanding that the individual is no longer obsessed with physical existence and survival there, but now focuses all his primary concern on the development of his higher functions.

Alternatively, anyone who 'attempts' to get involved in this dynamic ... someone who learns about esoteric initiation and thinks it might be the solution to their problems, but who has not lived long enough to accumulate the required degree of Knowledge of binary existence, will try to get involved in practices that open up the 'Daath' link, but will find that nature will not allow it. Their Nachash will still be far too robust and effective, and its absolute skill and cunning at maintaining the binary nature will be impossible to overcome. In this way the further such an undeveloped individual pushes in an attempt at storming the Temple of Wisdom, the more they will either come to fear the unescapable reality of Illumination, or the more confused they will become about the 'Knowledge' that is imparted to them as part of initiatory training. So they will either eventually run as fast as they can in the opposite direction from the practical requirements of initiation, or they will happily skirt around the real requirements of the path, blissfully unaware that no matter what they think they are doing, of an alleged esoteric nature, in 'reality' they are not doing what is required to make real progress. There is a huge difference between mimicking what looks like the behaviour of esoteric training, and actually being involved in esoteric training that leads to establishing the link between the lower and higher functions.

So what is the key to 'wedding' the two poles of the human consciousness, and by that means beginning the journey toward Illumination? The key is to 'seek Understanding'. To seek the state of mind that is Neschamah. The message of prime importance here is ... that learning techniques which you believe will give you esoteric control over things and situations is not occult study. It is an attempt at gaining skills that are

aimed simply at furthering material concerns. In the same way, being shown the simple manual techniques of how to make the Philosopher's Stone, by rote, by someone who knows the method, serves no esoteric purpose. Its only value is that it provides the student with a means to support his material concerns. The real purpose in the study of alchemy is to gain 'Understanding'. By Understanding the lab work, we come closer to an Understanding of the true nature of reality. That is, we gain more Knowledge of the true nature of binary reality. By achieving this aim we develop in ourselves the function of mind we call Neschamah, and our Ruach and Nephesh come closer together.

There is an old saying which is sometimes used to describe what the esoteric motive for the study of alchemy ultimately is ...

"It is the journey that matters, not the destination"

Understanding evolves out of a proper attention to the process of attaining the Philosopher's Stone. The PROCESS ... not the eventation of its goal. It is what we learn in the process of trying to achieve that goal that is the whole point ... and all things being equal, the goal is not achieved 'unless' the journey is made properly.

Why do so many people fail in achieving that goal? Simply because they want alchemy to bend and twist to meet their personal expectations and agenda. To win the game the alchemist must give up what he believes alchemy should be, and drop all agendas other than the attainment of Understanding ...

Understanding that eventually leads to Wisdom (Chiah), and full Illumination (Yechidah).

ESSAY TWENTY

Acetic acid

When considering the use of acetic acid in alchemy the first question that arises is whether there is some difference between naturally produced acetic and industrially produced acetic. It is often claimed that 'alchemically' it is productive to only use natural substances in alchemical work.

This idea, like a lot of modern ideas about alchemy, is based on a bit of a weird rationale. That rationale encourages us to believe that traditional, and therefore 'old' alchemy insists that natural substances are superior to manufactured substances. Its almost like saying ... the old Adepts tell us that we must use natural products instead of synthetic (industrially produced) products - in every case. Nobody dares come right out and say this, but the insinuation is blatantly there; and here is the real silly part ... how could traditional alchemy make this insistence when many industrially produced chemicals were not available to alchemists before the 1800s?

While I believe there is a 'degree' of validity to the 'natural' argument, I don't believe it counts where the use of solvents known by modern chemistry are concerned. That is, I personally believe (and so far my experience bares this out) that the use of industrial acetic acid is fine. So lets consider the commercial option first, then I will talk about how to prepare concentrated acetic by so-called natural methods.

Commercial acetic acid

Commercially produced acetic acid comes in three forms (basically):

- (1) Wine Vinegar (cooking)
- (2) Dilute acetic acid (food and non-food grades)

(3) Glacial acetic acid (99.99% pure, anhydrous)

In the first instance I refer to vinegar that is produced in industrial quantities from wine. This would probably be considered to be in the 'natural' category for most people, but in fact that grade of acetic is highly processed. All kinds of bulk vinegar that you might buy off the supermarket shelf come under this category. Generally they are made by vinegar production companies who buy the lowest grade 'left over' wines from wineries, which the wineries cannot sell as wine because of their low quality. A quantity of vinegars in this category are also made from fermented malt. Most vinegars in this category are in the range of 4-8 percent acid. Some still contain wine or malt products, and some have been distilled to remove those products to produce 'white' vinegar, which is really just acetic acid (4-8%) and water.

In the second category of dilute acetic acid, we can buy acetic which comes in various dilutions such as 4%, 20%, 30%, 60%, etc. Some of these dilutions are produced by watering-down pure acetic acid that is produced synthetically from inorganic substances. This kind of acetic is usually sold as industrial, commercial or laboratory grade and is intended for use in manufacturing and chemistry. There are also food-grade dilutions which are produced in similar ways to those vinegars in category 1.

The third category is what is known as Glacial acetic acid, and this is the purest form of the acid. It is referred to as 'Glacial' because it will freeze at relatively ambient temperatures (below 16°C), forming long slithers of crystals bunched together in packs.

Where I live there is a relatively wide range of costs for buying Glacial, which is what I most often buy and use for alchemical experiments. So I have to shop around to find a good price. But presently I can get 20 litres for around nz\$80. I

will then dilute this myself with distilled water to about 60% acid solution.

Natural acetic acid:

Basically, natural acetic acid is produced through the oxidation of alcohol. This most often happens when wine or beer is left exposed to the air, or has air pumped through it, and a chemical reaction takes place which converts some of the alcohol in wine or beer in to acetic acid. But that is a very unreliable way of making acetic acid.

The other natural way this reaction occurs is that a bacterium by the name of acetobacter gets in to wine or beer, eats the alcohol in those beverages, and oxidises that alcohol as part of its digestive metabolism, excreting acetic acid in the process. Usually when wine turns in to vinegar by accident, or through a deliberate effort, it is through acetobacter infection. Often this can be triggered off by simply leaving wine exposed to the air with a course gauze cloth over the container, where air and bacteria can have access to the surface of the wine. Acetic acid production from wine in this way is often called 'secondary fermentation' by winemakers and vinegar makers ... and should not be confused with malo-lactic fermentation of wines which can also be referred to as secondary fermentation.

Often when this method is used a condition occurs in the wine which is commonly called 'mother of vinegar' or simply 'vinegar mother', where a colony of acetobacter thrive in a kind of cellulose raft that forms on the surface of the wine. The bacteria produce this raft which looks like a flat disc of rubbery jelly, and from that vantage point the bacteria eat the alcohol in the wine and produce acetic acid, turning the wine in to vinegar.

Making concentrated acetic from vinegar:

A good many alchemists insist that when using acetic acid in alchemical operations that natural acetic must be used. So this means that naturally brewed wine or malt vinegar must be obtained, and the acetic acid concentrated out of that vinegar.

This concentration is usually done by one of three methods.

- (1) By distillation
- (2) By freezing
- (3) By the destructive distillation of copper acetate.

When I was in the early stages of my training in alchemy I was told, generally, that acetic acid cannot be concentrated by distillation. This is because, I was informed, water and acetic acid form an azeotrope, which means their boiling temperatures are very close together, so when you attempt to separate acetic acid from water by distillation the problem is they will mostly distill over together. Eventually I learned this in fact is not true. Which is a good example of the fact that many ideas that circulate in the alchemical community are untried and unproven cliché's.

Acetic acid boils at 118oC and water of course at 100oC. So the distillation temperature is close, but not so close that some advantage cannot be had by reclaiming acetic acid by distillation.

When distilling vinegar the first fraction to come over at 100oC is primarily water. The second fraction will come over at about 103oC, topping out at about 105oC. So save the first and second fractions separately, because each fraction has acetic in it which can be recovered through distillation. When the temperature hits about 105oC change your receiver and the third fraction comes over at from 105oc TO 118oC and is mostly acetic acid. But this needs to be distilled with care. Keep distilling until the residue in the bottom of your flask is the

consistency of honey. Then stop. If you continue to dry you may crack your flask.

By re-distilling this third fraction carefully you can attain an acetic acid that is 80 percent pure.

When we read old alchemical texts that instruct us to 'use good distilled vinegar', or some similar statement, the above process is what is being advised. 80 percent pure acetic is more than strong enough for most alchemical operations, including work with metals.

If you do your math, in order to obtain 1 litre of 80 percent pure acetic by distillation, you will need to process about 16 litres of vinegar at 5 percent.

To speed up this process we can make use of the freezing process, to remove much of the 95 percent of water.

To concentrate vinegar by freezing take vinegar and fill a plastic bottle half way(ish) so that when you lay the bottle on its side no liquid is covering the mouth of the bottle. Vinegar at 5 percent acid will freeze at -3oC. When the entire liquid is frozen open the bottle and tip it up to drain it into a collection bowl. The acetic will melt first at room temperature (melting point 16.7oC) and will run out of the ice into the bowl. Only the water, as ice, will remain behind.

You can collect a number of batches of this drained-off acid, combine them, refreeze, and proceed in the same way, to concentrate the drained-off acid more with each cycle.

http://www.alchemywebsite.com/distillation_of_vinegar.html

The final method to use, which was discovered by alchemists a good deal of time ago, was to use vinegar to make copper acetate. Then to prepare that acetate for destructive

distillation, and distill it. In this way the distillate will be glacial acetic, if you work with care. The destructive distillation of copper acetate does not produce acetone and a compound of organic oils like, for example, the destructive distillation of lead acetate does. But this process is by far the most dangerous of the three methods, and should only be attempted if you already have a lot of skill producing metallic acetates and with their distillation.

Just for the record, by the method of freezing and distillation, Jean Dubuis, who produced the white stage of the Philosopher's Stone via the acetate path, took 20 years to perform that work, and most of that time was spent simply in producing enough natural vinegar concentrate to carry out the work. So the argument of natural over commercial becomes a very important issue. (16 litres of vinegar to produce 1 litre of 80 percent acetic. The acetate path requires at least 60 litres of 80 percent acetic, so you need to process 1000 litres of vinegar ... which means removing roughly 900 litres of water from 100 litres of acetic.)

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

The Piety of the Old Adepts

There is little question that many of the old Adepts were pious men. When we read the best and most respected of the old alchemical texts there are few that are written without devoting at least a small portion of their content to making reference to the idea that alchemy is a sacred science, to extolling the virtues of the creator as seen through the eyes of alchemy, and of the need for anyone who intends being successful in alchemy to be mindful of this side of the science.

I think it is safe to say that a good portion of that which we might call the spiritual and moral talk in alchemical texts can be attributed simply to tradition (that it was the 'done thing'), as well as to the religious predispositions of the individual, and the culture of the time. But I also believe that anyone who has taken the time to really study some of the best and more philosophic alchemical texts, and to seriously think about them, would agree that amongst all of the published material in this kind of spiritual and moral category, a good number are written by men who seem to possess a truly deep insight into both the true nature of reality, and the connection between divinity and alchemy.

Certainly, a good portion of those alchemists who claimed success in producing the Stone of the Philosophers, were men who can be found in this spiritual-moral category. From this fact we might be excused for considering that some of the depth in their spiritual bent might have been the result of their alchemical work.

I don't think we can also ignore the fact that alchemy is a tradition that reaches back quite possibly 5000 years, at least, in to our past. That, the men and women who applied

themselves to the study of alchemy were inheriting a legacy which not only stretches back for millenia, but which also contains teaching and experience of a serious nature, a portion of which is very rare knowledge and well hidden. When any of us decide to study alchemy, and maybe also practice its manual art, one of the things few of us can deny is that we make this effort because we believe there is some merit to doing so. Taking it for granted, of course, that I exclude those who solely approach alchemy from a purely capitalist point of view, or who only have an interest in disproving its claims, or of placing modern science of a pedestal by means of making comparison. If we believe there is some merit in the study and/or practice of alchemy, this presupposes that we also see some merit in the teachings of the individuals who have left us record of their views and accomplishments. That is, that we do not believe that all alchemists are quacks, while at the same time believing that at least some of them were genius'.

If this is the case then it is also likely that if any of these genius' more than simply believed in a Supreme Being, and were not simply 'being religious' because it was a cultural predisposition of their age, but that they also insisted that there was some link between divinity and alchemy ... then such a claim might have some merit in it over and above any insistence, in some quarters, that such ideas are only the product of superstitious and primitive minds, or of the political and social pressure of a bygone superstitious age.

How can we say on the one hand that an individual, who had enough intelligence and insight to achieve one of the most difficult tasks open to human endeavour, was a genius when it came to esoteric chemistry, but an idiot when it came to concepts of divinity and morality? Doubtless there were individuals of this cadre, but to place every successful alchemist who had a spiritual-moral view of alchemy in to that category would not be reasonable. How likely is it that if the Stone exists, and at least some few individuals have produced it and effected

high-yield transmutation under ambient conditions, and claimed a link between divinity and alchemy ... that all such individuals could be so skilled and so stupid at the same time?

How are we to judge an individual who lived a life where he had solved one of the most elusive enigmas in existence? What stretch of the imagination, what degree of skill and insight, and species of intelligence might such a person have at their disposal in order to succeed in uncovering the arcana arcanorum? ... and what if such a person, existing in that state, made claims about the kind of morality and view of divinity that must accompany such a successful search?

Under these conditions, then, I believe that the question of the existence of a Supreme Being (of, as yet, undisclosed nature), is one which would need to be taken seriously. If nothing else, someone who has not achieved the Stone, and therefore does not share the special point of view of someone who has, is likely not in a position to make a productive argument against the case.

At the same time we cannot ignore the fact that for possibly 5000 years (or more) 'Hermetism' itself has not been based on an atheist philosophy. If anything, the extreme opposite situation has existed.

The most basic premise of Hermetic Philosophy, after the concept of the existence of a Supreme Being (or beings), is that alchemy proves that there is order in the universe, and that this order is evolving. A specific structure with a specific development. Hermetism teaches that this 'evolution' is the 'intent' of an intelligence that exists at a level that affects every department in nature. If this is in fact the case, then alchemy, which is the machinery of evolution, is intimately bound up with that which the divine 'intends' for nature ... for the evolution of the universe.

Most people who have taken the time to study alchemy closely ... if even only the 'ideas' which form the background philosophy upon which lab alchemy is constructed, are aware of the concept that esoteric alchemists teach that the ability for the Philosopher's Stone to transmute base metals in to noble ones, and to extend life and preserve health, is a sign, by analogy, that this situation that exists outside of us also exists within us. In other words, that a 'work' can be performed internally that will create a condition through which our base-selves can be exalted into a noble condition, and that through this means extended longevity and spiritual emancipation can be brought about.

Further, this situation, it is taught, has not come about by accident. That it is an essential part of the divine plan, and that, therefore, homo sapiens have a part to play in that plan. Many of the old alchemists certainly saw things in this way, and definitely made no bones about the fact in their writings.

If it is true that the study and practice of alchemy are somehow tied up with a deeper knowledge of the true nature of reality ... and that part of 'seeing' that true nature involves recognising a divine component to the structure and dynamic of reality ... then reason might dictate that alchemy itself is part of that structure and dynamic. If this is the case then the question arises, might there be some rule imposed on the 'successful' study and practice of alchemy? If so, might this rule constitute a kind of moral code that is a pre-requisite for success? A set of conditions, upon which success relies? A number of requirements in behaviour, belief and intent, before the science which reveals the true nature of reality is open for recognition to an aspirant.

If such conditions do exist ... where exactly is the line in the sand drawn, and who or what put that line in place?

Or is the existence of alchemy simply an accident of nature, with no inherent meaning, and therefore open to the discovery, understanding and exploitation of anyone, of any kind of pre-disposition, to unveil?

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

Spiritual Practices

Hi Greg (and anyone else curious about this)

>> (Interested to hear the reply, apologies if I posted "Inner Alchemy,"

>> stuff on the "Lab Alchemy," group page everybody, I am just

>> figuring out the two pages, I think ! :) Greg.

I was thinking about my reply to this post and considered it might be a good idea to explain a couple of things, because I am aware that a number of people here are probably curious about the idea of 'spiritual' exercises (for want of a less cliché term) that can be used in conjunction with lab work. The subject is one that a lot of students of alchemy think about, sometimes poking around in different esoteric closets trying on different approaches, but often never really have success with.

As many of you know I have spent a lot of my life investigating this side of alchemy, and teaching what I have learned, mostly in private. So very little is known about what in fact I teach on this subject ... or even about the nature of what it is that I teach.

When it comes to spiritual (inner) alchemy, its a kind of humorous thing that most people treat it is a certain way, which they like to believe is valid, while at the same knowing what they believe and 'do' about is almost entirely ineffective. This becomes a kind of very frustrating and embarrassing situation, which is why I believe most people to whom it matters never risk discussing it in public. So true to form, I'm going to break the rule, and say exactly what I know from experience,

and what I believe onm the basis of educated guesses, without fear that if someone calls me an idiot that this might mean I am an idiot ;)

When it comes to searching for inner alchemical practical techniques the first problem we come up against is that there is virtually no reference at all inside the actual alchemical tradition to instruction in any such techniques. There is even very little reference to the existence of any body of teaching that passes on such techniques. So we can't but feel that there might be some validity to the nay-sayers who insist such a category of teaching in the reralm of alchemy is complete rubbish. But ... at the same time, if we really have read widely and taken time to study and contemplate what we read, in the realm of classic alchemical literature, there are numerous instances where the allusion to a secret and probably oral tradition of esoteric alchemical inner work exists, or once existed. That is, that the old esoterically inclined alchemists were not simply approaching this on a trail-and-error basis, like most modern spiritually inclined students of alchemy do. But that on the contrary there seems to be a hint that some kind of well thought out systematic approach to alchemical inner work has existed.

On this basis, many students of alchemy who go looking for some kind of spiritual exercise to use in conjunction with their lab work find themselves having to look in areas outside of the strictly alchemical tradition. In my experience this usually means either (1) some Eastern practice, or (2) some process that is used in the magical tradition, or (3) some Western mystical technique.

There are immediately a number of problems with this approach. I will not comment on the issues connected with Eastern methods, because they are outside of the subject area for this forum, and having focused my time on Western alchemy I am by no means an expert on the subject of Eastern methods. So when considering the use of practical inner exercises from

the Western magical or mystical traditions, these methods can be grouped into two categories:

- Firstly, practices that have no viable effect.
- Secondly, practices which can work.

This might seem a little obvious, but in my experience many occultists take it for granted that all kinds of practical spiritual exercises will provide results, when in fact a huge number cannot, or do not. I remember talking to a guy in his 60s once who had devoted a huge part of his adult life to practicing one specific technique for so-called spiritual development, taught in a school he belonged to, which school insisted the technique was the most serious technique they had to offer. By the time he was 60 he once said to me ... I have worked this method religiously, almost on a daily basis, exactly as the instruction has required, and never once have I experienced anything I would consider 'serious' (as claimed by the school). Having complete confidence in the school he of course assumed the fault was with himself. I said to him in reply ... has it ever occurred to you that the technique simply doesn't work? His answer was surprise, and certainly disbelief that such a consideration could be valid. To which he said to me, how could you say such a thing? On what basis could you even believe such a thing?

So I asked him if he could allow me to make a point to him, by showing him something, to which he agreed. Over the next hour I guided him through a process which not only allowed him to experience a past life wherein he had experienced a glimpse of Illumination (over which he became extremely emotional and cried for 15 minutes), but also introduced him to his Higher Genius ... an experience which completely took his breath away.

Of this demonstration I said to him this ... this school you have belonged to has taught you many interesting things, I know that, but the one thing it also did was lie to you in telling

you that 'serious' inner spiritual practical exercises take a lifetime to show results, and then often only small results are the effect. The truth is far from this teaching. Real, powerful and life changing results can be experienced in a very brief period of time, if delivered by someone who actually knows what they are doing.

He replied to me and said, but it must take a long time to learn to be able to do that which you just demonstrated to me? I said, in answer, no. In fact I could teach almost anyone to do what I just did for you in less than a year.

Now, if this is true, then there is an entire tradition out there of esoteric training that is based on the misinformation that serious results from spiritual exercises take forever to achieve. But why does this situation exist? It is simple ... because the methods these schools teach simply do not work.

So when considering the concept of inner work training, it is first important to accept the idea that there are systems which work, and systems which do not. In this way we can focus on the ones that can work, and minimise the possibility of wasting a lifetime trusting a process which will never work.

When looking at systems which do not work we can divide them again into two categories.

First, systems which are fake and have nothing to do with practical techniques that can really lead to spiritual growth, but only assume the guise of such methods.

Secondly, systems which can work, but do not because either they are taught wrongly, or they are not studied properly.

Because of the increasing popularisation of the occult world, a huge number of incompetent teachers and incapable students populate the occult community. Most schools today will allow

anyone to join, and to advance, and to assume positions of authority, without their possessing any skill at all. So many systems that can have productive outcome as practical spiritual techniques are taught by people who have little or no idea how to pass them on in a way that allows them to provide proper results. Then, at the same time, most teachers and schools allow their students to muck about with what once were carefully designed techniques that could work, to the degree that their effectiveness is completely undermined.

The next idea we need to consider, amongst the systems which work, is that any system which does work ... according to the definition of what alchemy really is that I have previously provided ... must also be based on an alchemical formula. This is because spiritual development is an evolutionary mechanism, and as I have pointed out, 'alchemy' is itself 'evolution' in motion. For those of us who understand what defines actual alchemy (the rules of its formula), and also are very familiar with many conventionally accepted spiritual practices, if we are honest with ourselves, can we say that we can definitely pinpoint 'any' of these processes which are definitely following the alchemical pattern? I personally could name two that make an effort, but which do not include the entire alchemical process. And unless the method being used is completely alchemical, it simply won't work any more than a cake batter without flour will work. All the pieces have to be there, and worked in the right order in the right way, or success is highly unlikely.

When looking at the situation from this angle, if we look for a method outside of the strictly alchemical field, in the Western tradition, we will be hard pressed to find anything which is any more than an 'all for show' process that will not give us any kind of reliable or serious results. Add to this the fact, as already stated, that inside the alchemical tradition it is virtually impossible to discover any really usable information on any inner technique which is truly 'alchemical' and we are in a very difficult situation.

Now, this brings me back to the question asked by Oroborus and by Greg ... about whether or not there are any spiritual purification techniques I am aware of which are safe to teach?

The first thing to consider here, in answer to that question, is that I won't simply teach some method that nobody has ever proved works, but is taught conventionally as being the real thing simply out of habit. There is no point in that. You may as well make a list of every method you've ever heard of and then pick one at random and stick to it for the rest of your life.

My entire concern is with results. I am one of those people who got involved in every kind of spiritual teaching and school I could gain access to, and practice their methods religiously, and soon discovered that in fact most of it didn't work, or that they possibly could work but were badly taught, or I simply was too green to know enough to get them to work myself. So I made a pact with myself to seriously search for something that was taught properly and could actually give reliable and serious results. In this way, today, my only concern is with teaching methods which will actually give results ... because that option is vastly more satisfying than mere roleplaying.

What all of this means is that your average occultist is so acclimated to devoting himself to very conventional methods which give virtually no results, that most often when he asks someone for help in learning a technique which works, he actually doesn't expect it to work ... even if he hopes it will. The last thing he really considers is ... what if Rubaphilos teaches me a method for spiritual purification, and it works??!!

What is spiritual purification? It's a commonly bandied about term, but what does it really mean in practical terms?

What happens when someone reaches a state of spiritual purification? How will their life be? What will the journey be like?

In the past 25 years I have been in this situation with literally 100s of people (and have other tutors in the Heredom group who have also had the privilege of seeing this same process close up). In virtually every case aspirants approach tuition with us with a fervent desire for spiritual growth, but with virtually no idea what it really is that they are asking for. On the most basic level they have an idea that whatever it might be in reality, it is something 'good', therefore it must be ok to seek after it. But what is 'good'? What, from a spiritually pure individual's point-of-view is 'good'? Is it the same definition as the average guy's idea of good?

For this reason, and almost this reason alone, when someone who has walked the path of alchemical (internal) initiation, with a greater degree of success, is asked to teach what they know to someone who is just starting out, the first consideration that must be accepted by the teacher is that the aspirant has most likely never thought the request through seriously enough (not really researched what it means, systematically), and therefore has no idea how to approach effective training ... effectively. Because of this situation there virtually is no point in teaching anyone an effective technique for the inner work without also insisting on guiding them to a stage where they can continue without mucking things up ... if they really want the process to work.

rubaphilos

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

Initiation and the Teacher-Pupil Relationship

> Dear Rubaphilos;

> Thank you for your detailed reply. It's always nice to get clear explanations.

>> What is spiritual purification? Its a commonly bandied about term, but

>> what does it really mean in practical terms?

>> What happens when someone reaches a state of spiritual purification?

>> How will their life be? What will the journey be like?

> Will you please tell us more about this from your point of view?

> Also, how many parallels exist with Gopi Krishna's story when walking this path?

> How many of the side effects could be experienced when done the alchemical

> way and with a good teacher?

> Thank you very much,

> ouroboros

Some of these ideas I have already covered in essays 3, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, which talk a lot about what alchemical initiation is, and what it requires from a student (you can find them in the file archive at the Group's website). There are a couple of things you ask about here, though, that I haven't touched upon in any real detail yet, and there is an area of this whole dynamic I haven't talked about yet, which is the nature of the teacher-pupil relationship. So I will attempt to cover the kinds of things you have asked about, and work from the point of view of the nature of the Teacher-Pupil relationship.

Let's begin by considering the concept which was first raised in the thread that brought about this post ... the idea of 'Techniques for Spiritual Purification'. Just to be sure we understand what we are talking about here, the Spiritual (that which I refer to as the Higher Functions), itself, doesn't need to be purified. It is already pure (for want of a better term). Certainly, though, when it comes to practical techniques for Spiritual Emancipation, the Spiritual does purify 'us' (our Lower Nature). After all, we seek an open and productive connection with our Spiritual selves entirely because our Spiritual self is by far more functional, and existing in a position that can be of huge help in our journey back to expanded awareness and functional behaviour.

At the same time it is important to recognise that our Spiritual journey is not 'governed' from below. From our Lower Self. There is often the mistake made by new aspirants that the Lower Self, their everyday self, chooses to begin the Spiritual Journey, chooses how to go about it, which path to follow, which teacher to work under the guidance of, etc. But this is literally not the case. One of the reasons why we seek communion with the Higher Functions in the first place is because in fact our life is not governed from down here below, but from the Highest Expression of our selves which exists beyond our conscious awareness. Our everyday lower self is the puppet, and our Higher Self (Higher Genius) is literally the puppet Master. So we seek union with the Higher Genius entirely because IT is the ruling power in our lives, Who knows what is best for us, and which Path it is most productive for us to most quickly do what is best for us ... resulting in a life of maximum productivity, with a maximum of contentment and a maximum quality learning experience.

In the Crowleyian and modern Golden Dawn traditions this concept of the Lower Self striving to connect with the Higher Functions is the ultimate focus of esoteric training, and is often

referred to as "Knowledge and Conversation with the Holy Guardian Angel" ... after the description of that concept given in an arcane text by the name of 'The Sacred Magic of Abremelin the Mage'. The idea being that once the Magician establishes not only communication with the Holy Guardian Angel, but knowledge of what IT is, the Mage is then in a position to discover how best to live his life in order to be the most productive he can be, in all ways, and the most contented he can be. This idea itself, stemming from the teaching that we only experience discomfort and disappointment in our lives when we step off the path of least resistance to doing that which we are destined to achieve in this life.

When looking at the idea of an 'aspirant' who is on a Spiritual journey, back to the summit of his Being, we need to consider three conditions which exist relative to this journey. First, we could say, in a manner, that everyone alive is on that journey. The universe in its entirety is evolving toward a state of ultimate perfection, therefore everything 'in' the universe is also riding that universal wave of evolution. But ... there are two levels of commitment to that journey. The first level is a slow and unconscious commitment which 99.999 percent of humanity are involved with. The primary focus of their involvement in the journey is in still working out dealing with the game as it is presented to them here in everyday life. There are lessons here, that's why we are here in the first place, and you don't actually get the opportunity of get off the bus until all of the requirements of living an everyday life have been completed. Then, amongst the 7 billion of us who are presently fumbling about on the surface of this planet, a very small percentage, much less than 1 percent, have completed the journey of living daily life, and are ready for the next stage of the game.

But, the realm of esoteric searching is a little more complex than this. Because occultism has become so popularized we now have 100s or even 1000s of people who have 'decided' to get involved in the occult, who have not by any sense of

measure completed their need to deal with everyday life lessons, first. That is, the path of initiation is not open to them, even though they are actively living a life of involvement in pseudo-occultism. So it is important not to confuse the throngs of popular occultists with those who are 'actually' ready for serious esoteric training.

So the journey back to connection with the Higher Genius does not begin with the aspirant simply deciding one day to seek Spiritual Training. Real occult training, and therefore real alchemical initiation, begins before incarnation. The lessons we have learned, and the hard work we have done in the past, have promoted us to the position where a life fully entrenched in common daily concerns is not only no longer necessary, but detrimental to our existence. Because the true aspirant has reached this point previous to incarnation, once he is alive, his Higher Functions manipulate his reality in such a way as to place all the right experiences and ideas in his way that will be required for him not only to develop the kind of attitude which will force him to be '... an aspirant, duly prepared, entering of his own free will and accord' ... but which will also push his life events toward eventually being in the presence of someone who is a real 'initiator' (an Adept, in the alchemical parlance). No matter what else happens in such a person's life before that meeting, the 'powers that be' are primarily concerned with organising everything in the aspirant's life just so that fateful moment can occur when the individual who is ready, meets the individual who has the skill.

That single moment in time is that which defines the real student from the pop' occultist. That single culminating moment when the student meets the teacher is so important, because everything that has happened in the life of the aspirant up to that point is designed almost solely to 'force' him into a state of readiness, where, when he meets the Adept, that he recognises him for what he is, and ... asks for training. Without those two acts, on the part of the aspirant, the entire project is for naught.

Because a true Adept never solicits the involvement of the student. He makes himself available, but the measure of the student's readiness is that he himself must recognise the importance of the situation he is in, and then act on it ... of his own free will and accord.

But it must be understood, that act of requesting training is not an act entirely governed by the everyday person. Because it would never have occurred if it wasn't for the fact that before his present life he was already prepared, and during his early life his mind and his will were honed toward one goal by the Governing power of his Higher Genius.

Once the student has then performed the first act, which is to request training from the teacher, the real defining characteristics of his position as a true aspirant are still to be tested. There is a saying in esoteric circles that ... "many come, but few are chosen" ... and this is a very true situation. But the choosing of the real student is not made arbitrarily. It is entirely based on the condition of the aspirant. That is, on whether or not he has lived long enough and experienced enough of life's lessons, to now 'behave' in the way that the Path itself requires of a capable initiate. So the first task that a true Adept must perform, with his novice student, is to test his 'condition' to see if in fact he can do what is necessary in order to succeed in the journey of Spiritual Emancipation.

This is the point where nearly every 'assumed' esoteric school or teacher immediately falls down. Most people who operate from the level of pop' occultism, and most schools which facilitate a pop' approach to occultism, believe and encourage the idea that 'anyone' who simply wants real esoteric training can have it. It is the consumerist approach to the occult ... "I has the money, give's me the goods". Having paid the fee the pop' aspirant then expects to be summarily ushered up through the various grades of training, and to some day assume a lofty title and to be seen as an exalted figure of esoteric

accomplishment, or at least to have the doors of the Temple of the Mysteries opened wide to him. If we really think about it, how likely is it that the Supreme Being, who not only created and maintains the entire universe, and therefore established the mechanism of Spiritual Growth, would consider the payment of a fee as an sole acceptable requirement for access to the deepest and most ancient mysteries of existence?

At the same time the school itself will happily give anyone a graded title, and a position of responsibility within the organisation, entirely on the basis that monies are paid, books and documents read, rituals practiced and meetings attended. The entire concept of having achieved real internal development hardly ever plays any role in pop' occultism. In all my years of involvement with esoteric fraternities, societies and orders, and of having hob-knobbed with the circle of people who muster around the leading authorities in such groups, I NEVER once met a single person who showed the slightest understanding of 'real' initiation, let alone having attained even a modicum of its required achievements.

But in real initiatory training none of the trappings of the Hollywood version exist. There are no fancy Temples, colourful robes, exalted titles, chanting masses of aspirants. Almost the entire 'game' of the real process of initiation is internal, and rests heavily on the quality of the teacher-pupil relationship.

This is one of the things that appeals to me about alchemy. When someone exclaims ... "I am an alchemist!" ... the reply is simple ... where is your lab? Where your glass? and most importantly, where are the products of your alchemical operations? Where none of these things exist, there may be a study of alchemy, but there is no alchemist. The two things are quite distinct. The value of alchemy is entirely in the nature of the operation, and in the effect of the product. Everything else is decoration, and decoration does not a transmutation effect.

Now, because, in a manner, the 'contract' between the aspirant and the Adept was made before the incarnation of the aspirant, the internal machinery of the aspirant (his psyche) is fully aware of his position (at its deepest levels), even before he himself is. Not only this, but because real initiation is a natural (potential) process of human psychology, which flowers only in its right season, the deeper intelligent levels of the aspirant's psyche are already aware of just what 'real' initiation is. So as the aspirant fumbles around looking for serious training, even though he himself is not consciously aware of what 'serious' really means (although you can bet he will insist he does), his deep inner mind knows. So his deep inner mind also recognises the moment the aspirant actually comes in to contact with a real initiator. His deep inner self recognises this through two channels. Because the aspirant's deep inner mind already lives 'in the psyche', it also has a degree of connection with the psyche of other people. That is, even though we are mostly consciously unaware of it, part of us is always in contact with the deep minds of other people. So when the aspirant meets the real initiator, a psychic connection is made, which both parties are often aware of at some level ... even if it is only an unusual degree of comfortable friendly bonding. Then, as the teacher begins to describe the structure and dynamic of the training process, the aspirant's deep inner mind is paying attention (just as it observes everything we do), and that part of our mind recognises ... "ok this guy knows what hes doing". At the point where that (often unconscious) recognition takes place, a new condition in the mind of the aspirant awakens. That condition is that which traditional Hermetic teaching refers to as 'The Guardian on the Threshold', or 'The Dweller upon the Threshold'.

The Threshold is of course a metaphor for the threshold or beginning of the initiatory process. So inside each of us an intelligent function exists which self-vets us for our suitability for initiatory training. while the teacher is testing the novice for his suitability as an initiate, because of his own training and

experience he can recognise the appearance of the Guardian in the behaviour of the novice, and from the nature of this behaviour the teacher can tell very quickly whether the Guardian is going to stop the novice's attempts at advancing in training, or whether the novice has the maturity of self to master the Guardian's effect, and overcome it. Those novices who have not completed their work in the everyday world will display behaviours which show their Guardian will end their training, and force them back to their responsibilities in the outer life. Those novices who, alternatively, have completed their outer journey, will not only display behaviours that show they will overcome the influence of the Guardian function, but they themselves will experience an overwhelming (and often deeply emotional) recognition that finally they have passed that key moment that they have been preparing for all their lives, a meeting with their teacher, and their recognition of the importance of the event culminating in requesting training, and their acceptance.

Now, when considering the question of the dangers of alchemical initiation (one of your questions, oroborus), it is first necessary to grasp everything I've said above. Because now that the aspirant is 'inside the First Gate' of the metaphorical Temple of the Mysteries, what happens to him next will depend entirely on whether he is simply a window shopping, socialite, pop' occultist, or a real aspirant prepared for real training.

The true journey of initiation, toward a state of Spiritual Illumination, is a journey 'away' from our humanity (away from the herd instinct), and toward Adeptship (individuation). The average person, still needing to work out his progress through everyday life is programmed by nature to depend on society for his existence. So if he attempts real initiation the first problem he will come up against is a nagging anxiety, which slowly becomes a creeping fear. He won't know what is causing this fear (because its source is unconscious), but he will feel it, increasingly. It is a fear generated by his inner being telling him

if he keeps traveling this road, he is going to sever his connection with humanity, and by doing that become something 'unknown', where humanity no longer will serve as his safety blanket, and where he will have to become self-dependent. This something is 'unknown' because so far in his experience (in all his lives) he has never 'been' that thing, and so it is entirely outside his experience. That 'thing' of course is an Illuminated Adept.

With novices who are nowhere near ready for this journey not only does this anxiety and fear manifest itself in various ways in their life, but they carry out behaviours during training that undermine the effectiveness of the training process. Often these behaviours are things the individual has never experienced before as typical behaviours, which surprises the hell out of him ... things such as an inability to read and understand very simple instruction; the inability to communicate effectively with the teacher; extreme unreliability; lying and being deceptive in order to cover up an inability to function productively as a student, etc, etc.

So this is the first level of 'danger' in training. A potential for dysfunctional and irrational behaviour. This often carries over in to everyday life, and makes living a normal everyday life difficult to manage. The student won't eat properly, sleep properly, and may find his behaviour at work becoming erratic, putting his job at risk. This, coupled with the rapidly dawning realisation that contrary to his long held belief that he was a model occultist, and was destined for big things, is showing him in a very undeniable way that in fact he is far from being able to handle Hermetic training. In short, he is experiencing a form of identity crisis, and it is shaking up his entire life. The message his inner self is trying to send him is ... "danger! ... danger Will Robinson!" At this point the weakest students decide that in fact common society is right, occultism is evil and needs to be avoided. The slightly less weak individuals will decide that the problem is actually with the training system, or the guy teaching

it, and will happily or angrily leave and look for something else. Those who are close to being ready, but not close enough, will sense very strongly that they just touched the real deal, but experience a lot of sadness at the realisation that as of yet they need to step back.

Those who are in fact ready experience a very mild anxiety, almost no fear, upon approaching the Threshold, and make the crossing with little or no noise.

This kind of experience is had by people who approach both the Threshold in Magic schools as well as the alchemical, because the game is essentially the same in both. In the alchemical side of Hermetism this kind of event is also experienced by lab students as well as by inner work students, but it 'plays out' in slightly different ways at the beginning. For the inner work student the entire dynamic is laid out before them, like a cosmic drama, and they see and feel every aspect of it. For the lab student the drama is played out externally, in their outer lives and in their relationship with their teacher and other initiates with whom they parley. And, of course, in their lab, which is a model microcosm of the initiatory journey.

Once the training process is underway there are a number of other issues which bring up the question of risk as well. The journey from normal human condition to a state of Spiritual Illumination largely is a therapeutic one. Relative to the Illuminated state the average person exists in a dysfunctional state, where his Higher Functions are repressed, and his lower functions encourage illness and eventually death. The process of initiation is a journey of fixing all of the problems with the human mechanism that maintain dysfunction, so that eventually a state of balance and expanded awareness can emerge as the dominant condition in the aspirant's life. This process of fixing oneself is something most occultists, when it comes down to it, simply don't have the patience or desire for, and often not the bottle for. It changes the way we think. It causes us to

experience a wide range of extreme emotions. We must take a deep long look at ourselves, where we have come from, what we are, and where we are going ... with extreme naked honesty. As the therapeutic nature of the work evolves it changes us deeply. Things we once wanted no longer interest us. Things we once never considered, now become a strong focus of our lives. This changing identity can cause us to experience drastic changes in career, in our love life, in our relationships with family, friends and with complete strangers. Much of this can also drastically change our juxtaposition to normal social behaviour.

During all of this change, if the student has not established a state of trust with the teacher, a level of trust in which he could allow the teacher to completely and irreversibly change the nature of his being, a state of openness and quality communication, of honesty and reliability, then a number of serious risks become problems. The risk of serious mental illness. A risk of poisoning or of systemic, energetic or functional damage to the body. Injury by burning, and explosion. With everything to gain from success - wealth, health, knowledge, happiness and control of the fundamental forces of reality - there is potentially also everything to lose.

In this way, the real question is not one of, is the teacher good? Because if the teacher is not actually a capable initiator then there is no risk of finding oneself in the position of the kind of danger which comes from the real work. No risk of the kind of mental illness which could come out of not following instruction properly when it comes to manipulating the very foundations of the mind in the inner alchemical work. No risk that comes with ingesting true alchemical quintessences, because the ability to produce them will not be an option. The real danger arises when the student finds himself apprenticed to a skilled Adept, and then does not approach the work honestly and accurately, because then the forces that arise on the path of return will tear his life apart.

The path itself makes the demands as to how it is to be walked, not the student or the teacher.

"The way is straight, and the entrance narrow"

The ultimate goal of Illumination, which is essentially a journey to Truth ... for, 'Illumination' is a state where everything is seen, recognised and understood as it truly is ... cannot be won by theft or by dishonesty; by placing conditions on it or by doing anything less than giving our all to it. Heaven cannot be stormed. Knowledge of, and conversation with our Higher Genius, and of doing Its will, cannot be gained without sacrificing our own (lower) desires in place of the desire of the summit of our being.

"In order to gain control, we must first give up control"

rubaphilos

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

Some Essential Reading

I have been discussing the subject of good reading material, recently, with one of my students. So I thought it might be worthwhile providing a list, here, of texts I have found helpful to read. Amongst all of the works I believe are useful, for background information to alchemy, I have included here those which I believe are worth buying, for good reading material.

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A.E.Waite - The Hermetic Museum

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The Hermetic Museum is a collection of various classic alchemical texts that belong largely to the esoteric tradition. That is, these texts are not simply descriptions of recipes for making the philosopher's stone, but they include detailed and lengthy explanations of Hermetic philosophy in general, and the philosophy of alchemy specifically. Most of the texts comprising the Hermetic Museum also contain allusions to the tradition of spiritual alchemy. In this way the texts which make up the Hermetic Museum compose one of the most complete views of alchemy available and easily accessible to the modern reader.

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Dion Fortune - The Training and Work of an Initiate

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For anyone who is unfamiliar with the initiatory side of Hermetism, there are not many books which explain the serious side of that work. While, as of yet, there is no work which accurately explains the alchemical side of the initiatory tradition, there are a few good texts describing the magical initiatory tradition. Dion Fortune is an author who is often overlooked as a reliable source of information on this subject. But in my opinion she did a great job of writing books which plainly and clearly

describe the magical side of the Western Hermetic tradition. Her book 'The Training and Work of an Initiate' describes much that is applicable to the alchemical initiate as well as the Hermetic mage.

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J.F.C.Fuller - Secret Wisdom of the Kabbalah

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An understanding of Qabala is very helpful to anyone who has an interest in esoteric alchemy. There are many very helpful books on the subject, but I have found that the style of Qabala that has grown out of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn is the most productive presentation of Qabala. Fuller's book 'Secret Wisdom of Kabbalah' is a synopsis of the Golden Dawn Qabalistic system, with some very helpful additional insights added.

The important thing, when it comes to understanding the value in Qabala, from an alchemical point of view, is that the task is much easier if you have access to a version of Qabala that is as secular as possible. Traditional Qabala is heavily loaded with Hebrew religious and political overtones. But the original proto-Qabala, which the Hebrews inherited, was an esoteric discipline, not a religious one. Underneath all that surface pseudo-religious rubbish is a very serious, deep, esoteric knowledge ... which is Hermetic in character, and is therefore based on an alchemical understanding of the nature of reality. One of the benefits of the Golden Dawn Qabala is that it has stripped away much of the traditional Hebrew religio-political flotsam from orthodox Qabala. The Golden Dawn system has focused on pointing out the Hermetic nature of Qabala, and that system is described in Fuller's book.

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Regardie - A Garden of Pomegranates

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I think the next helpful work on Qabala, which goes into the basics in much more detail, is Regardie's 'Garden of Pomegranates'. Anyone who is in a position of teaching Hermetism has their own favorites when it comes to recommending beginners references to learning Qabala. I usually suggest this book because it doesn't contain too much of the usual lengthy explanations of ideas which are common to a magical view of Qabala, and which, for the alchemist, are really just superfluous to that which an alchemist needs to know about Qabala.

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Hartmann - Paracelsus and the Substance of His Teaching

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Even under the best conditions the teachings of Paracelsus are extremely hard to understand. The best surviving record of Paracelsus' teachings is found in A.E.Waite's 'Complete Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus the Great'. Anyone who has read this work will agree that there is not only a huge volume of information there to wade through, but that it is written in a style that is complex and verbose, and makes use of all kinds of technical terms that are hard to understand. On top of all of this, if we know anything of value about the Paracelsian view of Hermetism and alchemy, we will also know that many ideas that are had about his views today are based on misunderstandings or complete ignorance.

Hartmann was a Theosophist, who had a deep interest in Paracelsus, and wrote a number of books on the man and his teachings. All of which books are worth a read. But the one I have found the most valuable is the book titled: "Paracelsus and the Substance of His Teaching". The value in this book is that Hartmann breaks down the key points in Paracelsus' teachings concerning alchemy and Hermetism and explains them in careful detail. A careful study of this book will provide a view of occultism in general, and of alchemy specifically, that reveals some very interesting information about how serious

occultists understood Hermetism 500 years ago. It will be recognised, as part of the study of this book, that a lot of error has crept in to the modern understanding, and has been accepted as 'tradition' and as being accurate.

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Israel Regardie - The Philosophers Stone

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Very few people know anything serious and accurate about 'inner' or spiritual alchemy. This book by Regardie is one of the few books available that provides a somewhat accurate description of this little known side of alchemy. Regardie wrote this book before he actually was taught real lab alchemy. He based his writing on what he learned within the Hermetic Order of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn about Hermetism in general ... then translated that knowledge into what was really a guesswork about what he felt alchemy really was. True to the beliefs at the time in which Regardie wrote, Regardie thought that while there may have been some truth to the lab side of alchemy, it was more probably a secret encoded teaching about some inner initiatory process. So he wrote this book from that point of view.

The book, as a whole, is divided in to four sections. First, an introduction, which basically gives a description of the essential understanding of the psychology that is contained in Qabala. This alone is of much value. Then three sections which basically look at the idea of alchemy as a form of inner work by comparing that work to three quite different types of alchemical text. In the first section Regardie presents a classic alchemical text 'The Golden Treatise of Hermes', and then provides his commentary on the text, and what he believes it means from an esoteric (and Qabalistic) inner alchemical view. His descriptions here are very accurate and very educational.

Sections two and three can safely be ignored in my opinion. There is a lot of guesswork in these sections that is at fault

primarily because Regardie lacks any real knowledge of the true alchemical tradition.

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Anonymous - The Kybalion

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As I have pointed out elsewhere, I cringe at recommending this book, but it does serve the purpose of showing something that is not seen anywhere else. It is an explanation of the basic natural laws that are recognised as fundamental to Hermetic Philosophy. While the laws themselves are all and well, if an incomplete list, the explanations of those laws does contain some inaccuracies. This is especially evident where discussion of alchemy is concerned, which is understandable, since the authors obviously were not alchemical initiates.

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Knight and Butler - Civilisation One

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I read this book just recently. While it doesn't throw any deeply insightful light directly on alchemy, it certainly has value where a well rounded view of Hermetism is concerned. The book largely looks at a possible theory about where the weights and measures we use in everyday life originated, and how they were calculated and used by the ancients. I found this book very readable, and most interesting.

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A.E.Waite - Hermetic Teachings of Paracelsus

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The most comprehensive collection of writings attributed to Paracelsus. The importance of studying Paracelsus can be found in the fact that whether we know it or not, many of the ideas we take for granted about alchemy and Hermetism today actually began with Paracelsus, or we popularised by him.

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A.E.Waite - Secret Tradition in Freemasonry

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Waite wrote three books in his 'secret tradition' series. The Secret Tradition in Alchemy, The Secret Tradition in Rosicrucianism, and The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry. The one on Rosicrucianism was re-written (if I remember rightly) and published under another title. The Rosicrucian and Masonic books were basically the same thesis but presented from slightly different angles. The benefit of the Secret Tradition in Freemasonry, I believe, is that it describes one of the best descriptions of the early modern preservation and History of Hermetism in the Western Tradition. Wait is known for his exhaustive detail, and relatively good scholarship. In order to understand modern alchemy it is necessary to understand its history. The path alchemy has travelled down through the centuries and the organisations which played the biggest role in its preservation and dissemination all left their marks on the tradition. Freemasonry, historically, has probably done more to influence the way alchemy is today presented to us than any other institution.

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Bauval and Gilbert - The Orion Mystery

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This is an oldie but a goodie. It was a best seller back in the day (1984) when it was first published. The key theme in the book is the revelation of a discovery the authors made about how the builders of the three great pyramids at Giza were symbols, on the earth, or the three stars in the belt of Orion (constellation). That isn't really the real value in the book though. The real value, Hermetically and alchemically, is that the book explains (almost accidentally) how the ancient Egyptian Hermetic world-view was structured. That the Egyptians recognised a correspondence between physical life (on earth), celestial life (the 'stars') and inner life (the duat or sidereal universe). I will be writing an essay on this concept later on.

This book is easy to read, often easy to find at secondhand book shops, and an interesting read for anyone curious about ancient Egyptian esoterica, and the lengths the Egyptian initiates went to, to build monuments to their esoteric knowledge.

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J.A.West - Serpent in the Sky

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This book really grew out of West's interest in the Orion Mystery. So its a kind of follow-on from where the Orion Mystery left off. West was a keen student of Shwaller deLubicz's writings, especially his book 'The Temple of Man', which explains how the ancient Egyptians encoded esoteric knowledge in to sacred architecture. DeLubicz was a student of alchemy, and has been considered one of the candidates for the real source of Fulcanelli's 'Mysteries of the cathedrals'.

West focus' mainly on an archeological view of Egyptian esoterica. His interest is in looking at the objects the ancient Egyptians left behind, and what those objects can tell us today about the esoteric life of Egypt.

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Kerckweger - The Golden Chain of Homer

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This book has often been said to be one of the most important of all the alchemical texts. This is mainly because it describes all of the fundamental ideas (philosophy) upon which alchemy is based. It also not only explains these key concepts, but also describes the kinds of lab experiements which alchemists used to prove these ideas were real, in a scientific manner of speaking.

There are basically two versions of the Golden Chain. First, the original. Which you can find at Adam Mclean's 'alchemy website'. Secondly, a version which has a lot of later

annotations, by different authors, which increased the original book by many times its original size, and also made reading it very confusing. In my opinion the later annotations add very little of value.

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Halevi - The School of the Soul (was: School of the Kabbalah)

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For anyone who has never belonged to an esoteric school, or who has and would like to understand more about how they function, this book is one of a kind. It explains everything anyone would want to know about the structure and dynamics of how the whole idea of esoteric schools works. Halevi writes from the point of view of schools of Qabala, but what he says can be equally applied to understanding all true esoteric schools. A very informative book.

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Gary Zukav - The Dancing Wu Li Masters

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I believe that today anyone who attempts to understand alchemy without also having a reasonable understanding of modern physics and Quantum theory, is doing themselves a huge disfavor. Zukav is a bit of a newage author, but he has many friends in the physics community. At some point he decided to write a book about modern physics that could explain the subject in laymen's terms. I have read a few books of this kind (such as the Tao of physics), but I think Zukav does the best job at explaining things in easily digestible terms, and of providing as complete a view as possible.

The section where he begins to discuss how Quantum theory views intelligence, in relation to quantum mechanics, is of much importance to any serious alchemist.

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Rene' Weber - Dialogues with Scientists and Sages

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After Zukav's book I highly recommend this book. Weber interviews a number of famous scientists who work at the cutting edge of modern science, and a number of famous spiritual figures, and asks them to explain ideas for which they are well known, as well as answer questions about the nature of reality. The kinds of concepts described in this book are the very same kinds of ideas that any serious Hermetist should be considering.

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Patai - The Jewish Alchemists

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An extremely good and detailed look at alchemy in the Jewish culture, from a historic point of view. It is a very scholarly book, and because of this it contains lots of really helpful references to famous historic texts and individuals which we often don't have access too, because they are so rare. Of most interest to me were the sections on Zosimos of Panopolis and Mary the Jewess.

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Baigent and Leigh - The Elixir and the Stone

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Again, knowledge of the history of alchemy is very important. Trying to study alchemy and solve its riddles is almost impossible when seen outside of the context of its history. I have read a number of books on the history of alchemy, but what I liked about Baigent and Leigh's book is that it reads more like a novel. That is, it flows nicely, and isn't overly academic. It also contains their views on how Hermetism has affected modern popular culture, which is kind of curious to read about.

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Some additional texts for further consideration:

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Dion Fortune - Through the Gates of Death (A Qabalistic description of the afterlife process)

Kenneth Rayner Johnson - The Fulcanelli Phenomena (A close look at the Fulcanelli controversy)

Gershom Scholem - Origins of the Kabbalah (One of the best publications on the subject of orthodox Hebrew Qabala)

Kervran - Biological Transmutations (Although Kervran's claims have been questioned, the basic premise of this work is worth considering)

Schauberger - Power of Water (A curious modern look at the esoteric nature of water)

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

Safe Practice

Prompted by the recent posts on the Ens Melissa, I think it is time that I made a formal post on the subject of safety, where the practice of alchemy is concerned, in order to bring some very real facts into stark relief.

The average occultist, in an average lifetime of studying occult knowledge, probably gets to discuss occultism in a serious way with maybe 20 or 30 people. In doing that most occultists, I have recognised, won't discuss really serious issues with anyone except a handful of close friends. So when it comes to being in a position to assess how the study and practice of occultism really affects people, most occultists only have maybe a dozen people at most who provide for them a more-or-less accurate picture of the dynamic of serious esoteric study.

One of the privileges of being a teacher of occultism, on the other hand, is that you get to see a very wide view of human behaviour relative to occultism. For example, in my life time I have thusfar been responsible for overseeing the tuition of more than 450 people (and that is a conservative estimate). One of the things about the training I offer (as some of the people here who have been in a position to be trained by myself, or one of the other tutors in our Group, know), is that it is extremely personal. In the process of the first year of training the teacher and the student become very close, to the point where they know a great deal about each other's daily lives. This aspect of serious training is in fact so important, for the monitoring of safe practice, that the Group I oversee quickly ends the training of any student who does not make a concerted effort to maintain a close relationship with the teacher.

In the twenty five years I have been teaching Hermetism in general, and alchemy in particular, I have learned a huge amount about human behaviour when it comes to occultism. Part of this learning has arisen from the fact that our Group insists, as part of weekly practice, that students write very detailed reports about what is happening to them when carrying out the exercises they are given as part of lab or inner work tuition, as well as how the work is affecting their lives, and those reports are sent on a regular basis to their tutors. In this way we have accumulated literally 1000s of reports from students. Over twenty five years of collecting and comparing the results of the work our students go through, we have noticed a number of very interesting trends which form part of almost every student's approach to simple learning, as well as their approach to the effects of lab or inner work initiation.

As any of the other tutors in our Group will agree, one of the most common and most serious issues we have to deal with is breeches of safety protocol, and I'll give some examples of what I mean by this.

Every single student we take on must agree to 'Three Rules of Tuition' before we will even begin to consider their application for training. The third of those three rules states ...

"A student of The Heredom system of training must follow the instruction his tutor provides, exactly, without modification, addition, or subtraction."

Now I think upon reading that statement few people here would say that they do not understand what it means. The instruction is very clear and simple. Yet, close to 95 percent of new students we teach have it pointed out to them that they are in some way either ignoring important pieces of instruction, or that they are modifying instruction, in breach of the third rule. About half of that 95 percent will have to be cautioned again on this same matter, and a large percentage of that 50 percent will

have their tuition canceled within the first three months for a third breach of that rule.

That is, about half of the students we take on every year have their training stopped (before the end of that year) because they are habitually carrying out behaviours that make it unsafe to teach them either the lab work or the inner work.

Only a very small portion (probably about 5 percent) of those students who have their tuition canceled are what I would consider pathologically unconcerned with their own personal safety. That is, they simply don't see any safety issues, so approach the work in any way they see fit, believing they know better. The rest of those students who have their tuition stopped because of serial unsafe behaviour are genuinely surprised and often stunned that they somehow seem incapable of following simple and clear instruction. In other words, when one of our tutors have to point out to a student that he or she has not carried out some necessary instruction he or she was given, or has added to or changed a precise instruction in some way ... they are usually completely unaware of their actions until it is pointed out.

Almost half of all students we get have this problem on a reoccurring basis. The other half (roughly) will recognise the seriousness of their mistake the first time they are cautioned, and won't repeat the problem. That is, statistically, a very high percentage of people who habitually indulge in unsafe practices when studying lab work or inner work.

It is not only lab work that has the potential to be unsafe. Anywhere where we find serious inner work practices, in any esoteric tradition (by serious I mean practices that actually work), we will also find casualties of unsafe behaviour. I have watched more than a dozen serious cases of mental illness to the point of individuals becoming incapable of carrying out the normal routines of their daily lives as a result of their not

following simple safety precautions during inner alchemical initiatory work.

People die from practicing alchemy. Let us not mince words on that fact. People actually die from practicing alchemy, and it happens on a relatively regular basis. For example, in the thirty years I have been involved in the deliberate study of occultism, and of alchemy particularly, there are three people I knew personally who died from practicing alchemy. That number doubles when we consider the number of people I know of with one degree of separation from myself. That means, friends of friends who have died. Altogether, over that twenty five years, I know of around a dozen people who have died from practicing alchemy. Some of those people were also well known (relatively famous), highly experienced and qualified.

When it comes to injury, about half of the people I know who have practiced lab alchemy have caused themselves preventable injury through their work. Amongst them are people who have made themselves ill (and in a number of instances almost fatally ill) from ingesting substances that they prepared in their labs.

The disease of believing 'I know better' when it comes to safety cautions is endemic in the alchemical community. Even when dangerous or fatal situations occur within the alchemical community, which are heard about and well known, a huge portion of those who are aware, or are made aware of such events, never apply the lesson to themselves.

When it comes to just basic working with lab equipment and chemicals a good number of obvious potential dangers exist, and most of us are aware of them. But it never ceases to amaze me how the average person practicing lab alchemy will spend a good amount of money on safety gear, and take great precautions when using lab equipment and chemicals ... but without a second thought those same people will ingest

substances which they have no knowledge of, or next to no knowledge of.

In common herbalism many of the kinds of preparations which are made from plants are well known, and are very simple natural extracts. But in alchemy, a practice about which very little was known until the last 30 years, 'most' of the preparations made through alchemical techniques have largely unknown compositions and active properties. A great deal of the alchemical remedies we hear about today are preparations that only a very few people knew about 40 years ago.

When considering the issue of safety when it comes to ingesting alchemical preparations, the first serious issue we have to take into consideration is that the processes which are applied to natural substances to produce the end products are processes which are deliberately designed to alter the natural conditions of the material to extreme degrees. Purity and concentration of chemicals in alchemical remedies are often extreme. The concentration of active components is also often extreme. The production of substances during alchemical processing that were originally not present in the natural material the work was begun with is very common.

Take the Ens Melissa as an example. If you eat the fresh or dried leaves of the lemon balm plant virtually in any quantity it will not produce the effect on your body that alchemists claim their preparation of lemon balm ens will have. If you have a water or alcoholic extract of lemon balm, as is common in conventional herbalism, and ingest that extract, it will not have the same effect that the alchemical product does. This is the whole point in alchemical processing ... it produces uncommon results from well known substances because its method changes those substances into things they are not, naturally. Very little is understood about those changes generally ... and in many cases of specific alchemical preparations virtually

nothing is understood about the composition of the products or their active ingredients.

We are just fortunate that in the case of a small proportion of alchemical remedies tradition has passed down to us a knowledge of the fact that in certain doses they are safe to ingest. But in a large proportion of cases there are many alchemical remedies that when ingested produced highly surprising and also frightening results.

The important fact about this entire situation is that most of the reliable information about what is safe and what is not ... and of how to deal with the products that produce powerful results ... still is in the possession of a limited number of people ... and most of those people have been trained properly by a qualified teacher who has inherited a very old body of reliable knowledge about safety and usage. It is for this reason that I repeat, at every available instance, that anyone who approaches the practice of alchemy from the position of being self-taught, is taking a huge risk with either injuring themselves or poisoning themselves or causing themselves psychological damage.

With that I repeat once again, I make these statements from the standpoint of a great deal of privileged experience. An experience which has amply demonstrated that one out of every two people who come to the practice of alchemy ignore safety precautions given by people who are known to be experts.

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

Samuel Norton's Key to Alchemy

It has been a common practice amongst the alchemists of bygone ages, who were in the habit of publishing a number of texts on alchemy, to sometimes include amongst their texts one referred to as their 'clavis' or 'key to alchemy'. This is often the place where they explained the core concepts, and their meanings, which appeared in their other publications.

One of the books that belongs to this category is known as the *Clavis Alchemiae* of Samuel Norton. Samuel Norton was the great grandson of the famous Thomas Norton, who wrote *The Ordinall of Alchemy*, which was published in *Alias Ashmole's Theatrum Britannicum*. Thomas Norton is known to have been taught alchemy by Sir George Ripley, and we learn from Samuel that he inherited his grandfather's knowledge of Ripley's Great Work.

As we might expect most of the 'key' texts published by the old alchemists were still vague and made use of various kinds of analogy, metaphor and symbolism to veil their underlying knowledge. But one of the curious things about Samuel Norton's 'Key' is that it is not in the least vague, and explains all of the core concepts and terminology of Ripley's Great Work, openly. So amongst the rare alchemical texts that actually tell us something usable, Samuel's book is a gem.

Samuel begins by telling us that in the system of alchemy he was learned in there are five types of Philosopher's Stone.

- (1) The 'Vegetable' Stone
- (2) The Animal stone
- (3) The Mineral Stone
- (4) The Mixed Stone, and

(5) The Transparent Stone

He explains in some detail what each of these 'paths' is, and how they are worked. The 'vegetable' path is in fact what is most commonly referred to as the Work of Saturn, and today, the acetate path. I am not going to discuss the other paths here (anyone interested can refer to Samuel's 'Clavis' themselves). Unfortunately the only version of Samuel's book I have been able to find has the section describing the process for the vegetable stone missing. But, Samuel's explanation of how to decrypt the traditional technical terminology for the path of the vegetable stone appears complete, and so I will now discuss that here.

Samuel breaks down each stage of the work of the vegetable stone by first describing each of the terms given to the substances and processes of each stage. I will quote what he says in steps, and then add my explanations, thus:

"Moreover when they meant to hide the material of the vegetable stone, they then termed their Lead, Lead of philosophers; and being calcined which they afore termed Minium they again called Adrop..."

Most acetate path alchemists from the classic era referred to the natural (and crude) substance they took in hand to begin the work as either 'our' Lead, The Lead of the Philosophers, Antimony or our Antimony. When it was calcined, prior to being dissolved, they often called it Minium (red Lead oxide) and Adrop (which is believed to be a Latinised Arabic term). Some also called this calcined 'Lead' Sericon.

"...and the gum which to the vegetable work proceedeth of that matter; they call Sericon..."

This is in fact inaccurate. Sericon is the term given to red Lead oxide, since it is a Latinised transliteration of the Arabic

word zariquin, which means Lead oxide. The gum which is produced from this oxide of Lead was referred to as ... the gum of Sericon (see John Heydon's - The Wise man's Crown).

"The oil which proceedeth of that gum menstree, moreover, they termed the gum the green lion of the philosophers ..."

I suspect there is a problem in the above statement due to either a bad translation (from the original Latin to English), or a bad transcription. We simply wouldn't call the 'oil' which comes from the gum, gum again. By oil Samuel is likely referring to the product of the destructive distillation of the gum (acetate) of Lead. This oil, he tells us, is referred to as the menstruum. Here he back-tracks a step and tells us that the gum (acetate of Lead) is called the green lion of the philosophers. This is because that gum is most often a green colour.

"...and this menstree is called the blood of the green lion."

Then he continues by telling us the menstruum (distillate from the destructive distillation of the acetate) is referred to as the blood of the Green Lion. In this way, if you look at pictures of the Green Lion, in classic texts, you will see the lion looks like it is eating the sun, and that the sun is bleeding from its wounds. But acetate path philosophers know that this symbol is being interpreted back-to-front. The Lion is actually vomiting up both the sun and the blood (since both are being distilled from the acetate).

"The liquors which proceed from that, they gave the names of elements."

Once the 'menstree' is itself distilled, and its components separated, it divides into four substances, which are given the names of the four Alchemical Elements, Earth, Water, Air and Fire.

"For imitating the law and works of nature, we set her operations before us as a plate and frame of nature, for as there was four elements divided out from that; which is termed chaos (or hyle) so out of our prime hyle, we divide or separate four substances which we call elements..."

One of the core concepts of the laboratory Great Work is that it is supposed to mimic the universal process of creation. Through it we can recognise the laws and mechanics of nature. Therefore just as the four Elements of existence are separated out of the universal chaos at the beginning of creation, in our lab we too separate our four Elements out of our philosophic chaos.

"...of which that which riseth with most lent fire, we call air, or ardent water; and being thoroughly rectified upon the earth; that termeth Raymond his Lunarie."

Samuel then tells us that when we perform the destructive distillation which separates the Elements out of our chaos, when the heat of the distillation is at its lowest point the first Element to come over is Air. But this is in fact not the case. The first Element to come over is Water (H₂O). Air is the second. This Air is then called ardent water, because at ambient temperature, in a sealed container, it is a liquid. Samuel then tells us that Raymond Lull refers to this 'Air' as his Lunarie. That is, the alchemist's 'Moon'.

"The other water or liquor, which is more weak and of color more greyish, is the flood, or phlegme."

Here he now refers to the Element of Water (H₂O), which is also referred to as phlegm by alchemists and the 'flood' by acetate alchemists.

"The red liquor which is of goldenish color or somewhat more deeper red, is counted the oil or fire."

This is the third Element, a red oil which is the Element Fire, and comes over at the end of the destructive distillation.

"That which remaineth, is called the earth or ley [lees]."

The fourth Element Samuel refers to the sooty residue left behind after the destructive distillation is complete. It is the Element of Earth, also by some called the 'lees', which is a term used in wine making for the salt (tartar) which precipitates out of unfiltered wine.

"Sulphur of Nature, is the salt or sublimed lifted up earth of bodies, after the complete putrefication."

Next there is a substance called the Sulphur of Nature, which Samuel says is the sublimate of the metal. That is, its Salt sublimated. The putrefaction he speaks of is the destructive distillation. This sublimate rises at the end of the destructive distillation. There is also a method for making this Sulphur of Nature later in the work, using the white calcined Salt (basis) of the metal.

"The bodies are the metals. This sulphur is also named foliate or congelate..."

Sometimes in acetate path texts this sublimate is referred to as foliated earth ... or our congelate earth.

"...which sulphur being dissolved into oils, or liquors are called oil incombustible ..."

This is an important definition, because very few authors describe exactly what the 'incombustible Sulphur' actually is. Samuel, though, points out that the incombustible Sulphur is the foliated Earth, and that it is sometimes reduced into a special type of oil.

"...especially the oils of gold or silver, which is the ferment of the stone; Either being assigned to the Sun or Moon which are the chief lights of the world. They figuratively adapt the same names and are called the lights of the stone, for as the sun and moon are lights to the world and besides give influence in creatures, so the ferments are lights to the stone, giving it his chief influence; Moreover it is also called the soul which quickeneth the whole stone; for as the soul in man is cause of quickness and motion; So the ferments are quickeners and movers of the whole stone, without which it can never be observed."

Samuel describes the nature of these special oils when they are made from gold and silver which are used to actuate the Stone. These are what I refer to as oils of the third order ... produced from a metal by dissolution in Philosophic Mercury. Philosophic Mercury, we are told, has the especial property of dissolving metal 'radically', which means that once they are dissolved into an oil they cannot be returned again to their metallic state.

These oils of gold and silver are that which acetate alchemists refer to as 'ferments'. If these ferment oils cannot be attained, everything else we have done is for naught.

"So therefore we say join body, soul and spirit. By bodie we mean his sulphur, or his [...] alternate calces. By soul the ferment. By the spirit the tincture whether white or red. The Fire, ardent water. Lac virginis, or lunarie, is the white tincture. The oil or fire is the red tincture."

So we know the Stone is made by uniting the body, soul and Spirit, or Salt, Sulphur and Mercury. But the old alchemists describe how all of this happens in very confusing ways ... and we are encouraged to believe the facts are something other than what in practical terms they are. By body or salt is not

meant the Salt of the metal. But an alternative substance. By soul or Sulphur is meant the oil of gold or silver (depending on whether we are making the white or red Stone). The spirit or Mercury is either the white Philosopher's Mercury (for the white Stone), or the red spiritus oil (for the red Stone). [Note: there is obviously a translation or transcription error in the above passage because two different substances are referred to as 'Fire', and there can only be one Elemental Fire.]

"We give also in this art four fires, namely fire of nature, fire against nature, unnatural fire, and elemental fire."

Samuel now explains clearly what each of the four 'fires' are, a definition almost nobody else has provided us with.

"Fire of nature is the liquor extracted out of the bodies; Namely, the air, quintessence or lunarie, and is called the fire of nature, in that it is agreeable and amicable unto all bodies; And for that it recomforteth things corrupted by fire against nature. This fire of nature is also called mercury vegetable."

The Fire of nature is acetone. It is the clear spirit 'extracted out of bodies'. That is, destructively distilled from the acetates of metals. This Fire is variously called the Element of Air, also sometimes Quintessence. Ripley and Raymond called it 'Lunarie' (our Moon). It is also called vegetable Mercury because in fact it stems from the decomposition, and recomposition, of acetic acid, which is an organic or vegetable solvent.

"Fire against nature is all corrosive, and because they eat and corrode bodies, are called fire against nature."

Fire against nature is a term used for all corrosive acids (sulphuric acid, hydrochloric acid, nitric acid, aqua regia).

"Unnatural fire, are balnea, that is dunghills, or husks of grapes, which serve for digesting, or putrefying heats."

Unnatural Fire is a term given to all substances or apparatus' that serve as sources of digestive heat. Balneum Marie; decomposing grape pulp (composte); decomposing animal manure, etc.

"The last is Elemental Fire fed by combustible matter, of which fire we have three genders or kinds, and a number of species and degrees. Of which the first is called the fire of the first degree, and containeth all degrees between lent heat and scalding; and is the moist heat of water, called Balneum Maria. The second is the heat of ashes, which is a dry fire and his graduations is from the beginning to the end, double each degree of the bath; until the height of distilling heat. The 3rd degree is the heat of sand, whose graduations are from the distilling heat; unto the highest that can be given; that is until it be all fire hot."

The last type of Fire is actual flame, including flame tempered by different 'baths' which regulate flame heat. The old alchemists divide regulated and unregulated flame heat into four 'degrees': (1) Water bath, which gives mild heat up to heat that would scald the skin. (2) Ash bath, which is twice as hot as the water bath. (3) Sand bath, twice as hot again. (4) Open flame.

"The first degree of fire is for digestion, putrefaction, separation of air and water, and circulation, or with dissolution and rectification. The second degree of fire serveth for some rectification, desiccation, coagulation, sublimation and dry calefaction. The fire of the 3rd degree pertaineth to the extraction of oils, corrosive waters, precipitation, and things to be done raised with extremity of fire."

Samuel above describes what the first three degrees of heat are used for.

"To speak of earths, and first of the vegetable stone; we have twain, and yet both come out of one matter. The first is that, which remaineth behind upon the draught of the menstrue. The other is the residue which remaineth in the bottom of the glass after the separation of the elements and it is called the earth of the stone, or the second black earth."

There are two Earths in the acetate work. The first is the sooty residue left behind after the destructive distillation. The second Earth is left behind after rectifying the distillate from the destructive distillation.

"(except for preparation of ferment) we use no other waters but our mercuries white and red."

ESSAY TWENTY-SEVEN

An Introduction to Ripley's Writings

As a prelude to further consideration of the 'ionisation of organic matter' school of alchemy, I thought it might be helpful, or at least mildly interesting, to say a few words about Sir George Ripley [1415-1490] and the alchemical texts that are attributed to him. One of the things that makes this a worthwhile subject for discussion is that it aids us in understanding some helpful things about the possibilities of how and why some alchemical texts were written by people who used another author's name ... and why some of these texts might be of more use to us than those written by the original author.

The academic world tells us that there are about 25 different texts attributed to Ripley, as author. In reality it is more likely that only one or maybe two of those texts were actually written by him. The following is a list of the more well known texts attributed to him:

- The Compound of Alchemy (in Twelve Gates)
- The Bosome Book
- The Medulla of Alchemy
- Liber Secretissimus
- Five Preparations of Mercury
- The Ripley Scroll
- The Mistery of Alchymists
- The Cantilena (or George Ripley's Song)
- A Treatise of Mercury and the Philosophers Stone
- Ripley's Vision

Of all of these texts the only one for which we have any kind of good evidence of his authorship is 'The Compound of Alchemy' (Also known as "The Twelve Gates"). This is because Ripley himself states that in 1477, on the return from his travels

in Europe (Primarily Italy), where he was taught the great secret of alchemy by an Adept, he published his knowledge of the great work in 'The Compound of Alchemy'. Most of the other works that are attributed to him have some tell tale mark that betrays the likelihood the text was produced by someone else. While he himself also stated that everything he wrote before "The Compound" was false, based only on inexperienced guesswork.

The Compound of Alchemy is a work of verse and allegory. On this basis it is suggested (by academics) that Ripley's preference of format in which to reveal his knowledge of alchemy is that of poetic story telling. On this basis texts that do not take on the structure of allegorical verse are looked at with suspicion. Some past authors who likely took this same view, and published works under Ripley's name, were also careful to produce their texts in the format of verse. Thus we can see amongst the list of works attributed to Ripley about half of them are alchemic poetry. Nevertheless, this is really a shakey basis for judging which works might have originated with Ripley. Because in Ripley's day alchemical texts in poetic format were relatively common, and a good number of them deal with the same path to the Stone for which Ripley is most famous.

Then we have the issue of a little stronger evidence in texts such as the Bosome Book, Liber Secretisimus, and The Medulla. In the Bosome Book two of the passages begin by speaking of Ripley in the Third person. That is, they refer to Ripley as if he is someone other than the person who wrote the text. The Medulla also has this same revealing mark. But, while this third person reference might be seen as a good indicator that someone other than Ripley wrote those two texts, we cannot rule out the fact that on occassion some writers have referred to themselves in the third person. It is considered somewhat goshe to do so, in literary circles, but it happens.

Then, if we look very carefully at Liber Secretissimus, and have a good familiarity with its style of writing, and the content of its descriptions, we can see that parts of that text are very likely plagiarised (with the addition of a little thinly disguised poetic license), from The Bosome Book. That is, I suggest that Liber Secretissimus was written by someone who (for reasons known only to themselves), wanted to produce a text that looked like it was Ripleyian in character ... and to do so they attempted to borrow that style from the Bosome Book. Now, we could argue that to a smaller degree the same style exists in the Bosome Book and in Liber Secretissimus because the author was the same person (and in fact that might be the case, whether it was Ripley or not), but we should consider the argument ... why would the same author write two texts that were very similar? There is an additional problem with Liber Secretissimus though, which would only be recognised by someone who had intimate experience with the Ripley approach to the acetate work ... and that is that Liber Secretissimus has some serious technical errors in it. That is a dead giveaway that it was possibly written by someone wanting to fake a text, and someone who had little or no accurate knowledge of acetate alchemy. (Another excellent example of this kind of problem is found in the version of the Rosarium Philosophorum that has the text added to it. Whoever added that text to what was originally just a set of woodcuts, had virtually no idea of what the woodcuts were explaining).

At the same time we also must recognise that after many readings of The Bosome Book, The Compound of Alchemy, and The Medulla of Alchemy, each of these texts is quite obviously not written by the same person, (the quirks of translation and transcription over long periods of time taken in to consideration). They also are very likely not anywhere near written at the same point in history. They all show quite obvious examples of developments in the English language set probably centuries apart. Also (in the case of translations) of differences and developments in the way Latin was translated in to English.

While all of this is good and fine, we cannot lose sight of the fact, though, that just because some guy, at a later time, wrote a work to which he appended the name of an (historically recognised) individual other than himself, does not automatically mean that the content of the text has no value. I'll explain why.

Imagine a situation where someone at or after Ripley's time was studying Ripley's "Compound" with the intent of sorting out its description clearly, and of mastering the process it described. That is, he was using The Compound as a textbook instruction manual. If you look at The Compound (<http://www.levity.com/alchemy/rip gates.html>), you'll see quickly that its not an easy text to use as the basis for practical experiment. But what if you had enough understanding of the practical method described in The Compound to allow you to work out the process described therein, and you also had a disposition to describe that process in a more lucid format than the verse of The Compound contains?

I suggest that at various times it is not unlikely that certain individuals, having reached a good degree of understanding of Ripley's more enigmatic text(s), felt it was acceptable to republish a description of that same information, but in a format that was easier to understand. Out of respect for the Adept who first presented the information, and for the fact that the later author cannot ethically claim to be the source of the original ideas, that later text is published under the original Adept's name. (It could readily be said that this situation is not isolated to Ripley's works alone, but at one time was very much a tradition, generally.) We might also find it helpful to understand that it has been traditional, in certain circles, to see a past Master of the work, who's texts were studied as one's prime source of inspiration, as having been one's very own Master, even though you had never actually met that person. In this way such persons might publish their views on alchemy under that

earlier Master's name, out of a different kind of very personal respect and humility.

Certainly, in my experienced opinion, I believe that this is the situation that exists with reference to The Bosome Book. That Ripley did not write it, but that it is a re-presentation and in a manner a paraphrasing of a more enigmatic text(s) authored by Ripley himself. In this way if this reinterpretation is an accurate representation of the teaching of Ripley, then that text is as valuable as a source of information, or possibly even more valuable, than the original work(s) upon which it was based.

With this view in mind, and with some understanding of the work Ripley describes in his Compound, it is interesting to read first the Compound, then The Medulla, then The Bosome Book, and finally Samuel Norton's Clavis, and see in those works, read in that order, an increasingly clearer exposition, in stages, of the very same ideas, belonging to the same school of thought.

In the entire canon of alchemical works this situation might be unique. The existence of a string of texts which follow a specific and historically verifiable 'path', and which clearly describe that path in an evolving and increasingly lucid manner. A path which we can trace back to at least circa 200AD.

Where other well known paths are concerned it is almost impossible to pinpoint exact instances of texts that belong to the exact same method-path. Where the infamous Flamel path is concerned, for example, when we compare any two texts that seem to belong to that genre, their method of presenting information and the techniques they describe are so confusing, and often different, that it is virtually impossible to say we know both authors were looking at and describing the same thing. Similarly, most of these other paths do not have a history that can be traced back much before the 1500s. Some cannot be traced back before the 1800s.

With a good understanding of The Compound of Alchemy, The Medulla of Alchemy, The Bosom Book, Samuel Norton's Clavis and Hollandus' Plant Work, a view of the acetate path ... actually, 'the path of the pyrolytic distillation of organic matter' (which doesn't necessarily require the use of acetates or metals), can be very clearly and accurately understood. This then allows us to relatively easily recognise the works of authors other than Ripley and Hollandus which also belong to this genre. If you embark on this avenue of research, like I have, you will come to recognise that works belonging to the acetate path genre make up the largest collection of texts wherein an exact and known approach to the Great Work can be recognised and successfully studied and practiced.

ESSAY TWENTY-EIGHT

On Alchemy and Secrecy

Anyone who has a broad and good experience of Western esotericism generally, as well as having a good familiarity with the reality of Western alchemy, will know that of all Western occultism alchemy is the least understood.

With magic, astrology, divination and other forms of occultism a lot of techno-babble and claims can be made about the value of results that cannot be substantiated. But with alchemy, it is all about results ... about the empirical proficiency of end products. If what you have in your hand at the end of the work doesn't perform as expected, all your opinions, theories and claims mean nothing.

When we observe discussion in alchemical discussion circles, over a long period of time, and get to know people who are seriously researching lab alchemy, we eventually come to recognize that (no matter what anyone believes or insists) serious results are very rare. If we are the kind of person that isn't happy with simply looking cool because we read books, quote authors and pass around pictures of our lab gear, but really want reliable results, then we soon come to the realisation that 'results', in and of themselves, have a very special place, and value.

Those rare individuals who are in a position to attain real and reliable results are therefore in a privileged position. That is, they have an understanding of alchemy that goes way beyond mere theory and opinion. It includes a knowledge arising from being actively involved in the ingestion of real, effective, alchemical products. Individuals who exist at this level of alchemical experience, almost entirely without exception, actively practice a careful keeping of secrets. The nature of this

secret keeping almost always focuses on one type of information ... the keys to processes, without which success is highly improbable.

Most of us are aware that there is an ongoing debate about the ethics of maintaining a veil of secrecy concerning the keys of alchemical technique. What most people don't know, or even consider, is that the people who possess those secrets do not enter the debate. Partially because, being in the position they are in, they don't have to. As for the rest, it is easy to demand a more open exchange of information when you have little or no understanding of the thing you insist you should have access to. As I often say ... its easy to insist on openness when you don't have a real secret to keep.

We have experienced, when training students in lab, that they often want us to be completely open with them as far as how much we will teach, and how far we will go. But we also notice that once they discover something important themselves, possibly something the rest of the Group does not already understand, they will often immediately become quiet and want to keep the details of the knowledge to themselves. So it is curious, as I say, how important openness is, until we find something worth being quiet about. In this way, keeping secrets might almost be considered a natural inclination for humans.

When we consider the naturalness of the desire to keep secrets, that brings us to the subject of the 'nature' of secrets themselves. One of the arguments that is often brought forward by people who desire to expose everything, is that esoteric secrets are a thing of the past. A necessity of a past age, which necessity no longer exists. But this is obviously just an opinion, and one which is not based on fact. The 'fact' is that we, as humans, do not know everything about the nature of reality, or the true nature of ourselves. If we did, we wouldn't be seeking Spiritual Illumination (sic: full knowledge).

What this tells us is that nature herself has designed us in such a way that secrets about the true nature of reality are kept from us. We aren't talking about curious little oddities here ... we are talking about seriously powerful and deep secrets about the true nature of reality, and the extent of our potential as humans. So, when considering if the very act of keeping secrets still has value, the answer is simple ... nature herself thinks it is.

When a person is fortunate enough to reach a point where nature has decided at least some of her secrets will be revealed to him, then that person finds themselves in a curious position. He knows he now sees something that previously was a verbatim secret ... a mystery. Not something that is called a mystery, or 'occult' by popular occultism, but a real secret. He knows nature has deliberately hidden this thing from the bulk of humanity, and that today he is one of a small number of people who share that knowledge. When that moment arrives, that person finds himself in a conundrum. The question arises ... I know that this secret has been revealed to me, but is it acceptable that I indiscriminately reveal it to other people? Then, if I am careful about who I reveal it to, how careful do I need to be? What level of restriction is necessary, and what level of acceptability defines a candidate to the revelation of that mystery?

On top of all of this we cannot ignore another factor. A factor which almost nobody takes into consideration, because they are unaware of the situation. Nature itself is intelligent. Anyone familiar with the basic tenets of Hermetic magic knows that intelligence is present everywhere around us. Magic attributes intelligence to plants, animals, moons, planets and suns, for example. Nature is one vast conscious and intelligent organism. If we consider the extent of this intelligence, and the fact that behind the obvious mundane level of our world, intelligences that cannot be seen and which average humanity has no idea exist, live and evolve and have their own designs on reality ... we must also accept that our lives and behaviour do not go

unobserved. Since we too are a part of nature, and therefore are produce of intelligent planning.

The revelation of real secrets, real mysteries of nature, does not happen by accident. When some aspect of real occult knowledge is revealed to someone, it is only because some intelligent being (or more than one) who is responsible for protecting that knowledge and keeping it hidden from the average person, chooses to reveal it. If such a situation exists (and my experience insists it does), then when that knowledge is revealed it is only done so because certain conditions exist in the life of the person receiving that knowledge. In other words, that person has reached a point of understanding something important about the nature of the secret, or of secret keeping in general. If that much is true, then it is worthwhile asking ourselves ... if the person receiving the secret was to abuse it, what might be the reaction of the intelligence who's responsibility it is for guarding it? How far could that intelligence go in response to maintaining the security of that secret, considering that such an intelligence likely understands a great deal more than the average person about how reality functions, and therefore may have access to 'tools' for correcting problems of this nature, which the average person has no idea of.

The reason for my making this point is that ... when a genuine mystery eventually is grasped by an individual, his juxtaposition to the question of whether or not he should maintain that knowledge a secret is NOT solely his decision. To choose to reveal a secret oneself, may in fact cross the line with the original secret's keeper, which act itself may draw to oneself serious consequences.

The entire subject of esoteric secrecy is far more involved, and has farther reaching consequences, than those who would have us all reveal everything we know, would have us believe. With knowledge comes responsibility ... and part of that

responsibility may be to respect a NEED to keep certain ideas away from popular circulation.

In my experience, when someone insists I reveal something, which is generally hidden, to them, they insist on this only because they themselves lack the ability to discover the truth themselves. In such a case I have to ask myself the question ... do they lack that ability by accident, or for a good reason?

ESSAY TWENTY-NINE

A Productive System of Study

I figure that maybe it might not be a bad idea to tie together a bunch of the previous ideas I have discussed, on the subject of productive training, and describe them as one flowing system. Specifically, what components are best required in order to have the best chance at success in the study of advanced alchemy.

Before anything else a good education in alchemy must begin with two things ... an expert source of instruction, and the required degree of intelligence to follow that instruction productively. The old Adepts were unanimous in their agreement that a successful education in alchemy required either an expert teacher, or divine revelation. Since divine revelation isn't handed out on every street corner, and is by far the rarest avenue that success comes through, that leaves the serious student primarily with the option of finding an expert teacher, while still a rare situation, is infinitely more doable. By expert is meant specifically someone who has an accurate understanding of the theory of the work, as well as its practice, has walked the walk and so can speak from intimate experience.

At the same time, while the necessity and the qualifications of a teacher are a requirement, there is also the oft ignored factor of the qualifications of the student. I say often ignored because experience demonstrates that most students of the occult take it for granted that they naturally possess everything required for the successful study of alchemy, in themselves. History demonstrates, though, that out of the many who rise to the challenge of succeeding in the study of alchemy, very few, indeed, ever obtain the privilege. What this tells us that many think they have what it takes, but the reality is they don't. It is

not hard to draw the conclusion from this well known fact that success comes with its own requirements, some of which relate directly to the aspirant's ability, or lack thereof, to actually solve the puzzle of the secrets of alchemy. Therefore, the question of the role of the "level of intelligence" required to grasp and solve the problems of alchemy is raised.

In this way, the two first requirements of the successful study of alchemy are a teacher who possesses an accurate knowledge, as well as the skill to pass that knowledge on productively, and a student who possesses a level of intelligence necessary to grasp that which the teacher provides (see the top layer of the flow chart in the attached diagram).

The proof that this relationship is working the way it should, and heading in the right direction, comes with the ability for the teacher to open a link between the student's lower mind and his higher faculties (the second level on the flow chart). Once that state is attained by the student, the scene is then set for him to be properly open to receive an accurate grasp of that which we might call the three pillars of alchemical knowledge.

These three pillars are three bodies of knowledge, the proper study and understanding of which is absolutely necessary for success. I have

numbered these three aspects of knowledge 1, 2 and 3 on the flow chart (attached).

The foundation of these three is an accurate teaching of Hermetic

Philosophy (1). That is, a body of knowledge concerning the core laws

and systems which govern the nature of reality. The underlying

principles upon which nature rests. This is probably the most difficult aspect of alchemical knowledge to gain a complete view of,

because among all of the published literature on alchemy, magic and

hermetism in general, an understanding of Hermetic Philosophy appears

only fragmentary, incomplete and scattered broadly. But without an

effective understanding of Hermetic Philosophy the student of alchemy

is open to believing anything that might come his way, presenting

itself as solid fact.

The second pillar of knowledge is an accurate understanding of the

theory of laboratory practice (2). Before we can know what constitutes

accurate knowledge of lab theory, we first must understand Hermetic

Philosophy. This then allows us to understand what defines alchemy

from other forms of chemistry, medicine and initiation. It also allows

us to know what constitutes alchemical mechanics, so that we may

recognise the necessary manual techniques of lab alchemy.

The third pillar of alchemical knowledge is an accurate teaching in

the theory of inner (psycho-spiritual) alchemy (3). Anyone who

attempts to understand lab alchemy without an understanding of the

'mind' of alchemy, is little more than a person involved in an alternative form of chemistry, not recognised by mainstream chemists.

There is no 'alchemy' without mind. That mind factor cannot be

understood without a solid education in esoteric psychology (not an

easy education to come by). At the same time ... if we approach

alchemy from a strictly lab angle ... and we succeed in making

alchemical prep's of legendary potency ... which prep's will undoubtedly have a powerful effect on our mind ... then what? What do

we do when we find ourselves under the influence of an alchemical

remedy that alters our deep psychology ... and we have not the

slightest idea what on earth is going on? That kind of scenario

belongs only to people who are not thinking their way through alchemy

with the minimum amount of reason. It is an idiot's view ... and how

likely is it that an idiot will succeed in alchemy when someone like

Isaac Newton, one of the greatest thinkers in modern history, couldn't

solve the alchemical enigma?

Now we have it ... a connection with the higher functions that allows us to easily grasp the nature of the most difficult problems. An education in Hermetic Philosophy that allows us to understand the core principles of alchemical reality. Accurate lab tuition, and a tuition in accurate esoteric psychology. Now we are in a position to pull all of this together into a single united view of the functional nature of reality ... the so-called 'Vision of Hermes'. This is possible, and easy, only because of our connection with the higher functions ... which by its very nature tends to unify everything seen under the light of its magnifying glass.

Only once all of this previous work has been dealt with seriously are we now in a real position to "UNDERSTAND".

Only with that Understanding have we the slightest possibility to NOW work an accurate practice in the lab.

Then, from that accurate practice SUCCESS is assured.

ESSAY THIRTY

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (1) Some Background

Before discussing the actual lab work itself, I think it wise to first talk a bit about the basic history of the Acetate Path, particularly its most recent history. This will help a good deal to put the information I will provide in the next few essays in to context.

We should first be aware that the method of making the Philosopher's Stone which we call today the Acetate Path, was originally called 'The Work of Saturn' (Opus Saturni), and 'The Path of the Vegetable Stone'. This last name can be a bit confusing, because in modern alchemy we are taught that the vegetable stone is something made from plant material. But we will see, as these next essays unfold, that there is a good and interesting reason why this name was also used, at one time, for one of the ways to make the Philosopher's Stone.

The earliest record we have of this work is in the writings of Zosimos of Panopolis [circa 300AD]. Zosimos quotes Mary the Jewess [circa 200AD] where she cryptically describes the basics of The Path of Saturn. Pieces of what she had to say are quoted in the well known book 'The Rosie Crucian Secrets' (Anon), in reference to the description that book gives of the Acetate Path.

During the renaissance period it could be argued that the Path of Saturn was the most widely written about, and practiced, of all Paths to the Stone. A number of the earliest and most secretive European Rosicrucian Brotherhoods left rare manuscript descriptions of their researches into this Path. During the late medieval period and the renaissance we see it explained in the works of alchemists such as Paracelsus, Ripley, The Black Monk, Hollandus, Arnold of Villa Nova, and

Parisinus. Even though we know the origins of this Path stretch back before the dawn of Christianity, it is Ramon Lully [circa 1260], who we today recognise as the most immediate father of this Path, for two reasons: because he is usually the oldest source quoted by the old Adepts of this Path, and because the language and techniques specific to this Path originate historically, most often, with Lull.

At the end of the 1600's, when the dawn of modern science arrived, alchemy went underground. Toward the end of the 1600's and on in to the 1700's we see less and less public written material on this Path (and on alchemy in general), and an increasing amount of the surviving literature during this period comes from secret documents passed down within a few rare and serious esoteric organisations which still held the old mysteries.

Accurate information about alchemy in general, and about the Acetate Path specifically, almost entirely dissappeared from the public view by the 1800's. If we look at the records of the many Western esoteric schools that sprung up in the 1800's, we find only a few references to alchemy, and almost all of those references are strictly superficial, and often full of errors and complete misunderstanding. For example, by 1888, when the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the most serious and influential esoteric Order in modern times, was created, it contained virtually no instruction on the subject of alchemy. This provides us with evidence that the most serious occultists in Europe during the closing decades of the 19th century had almost no contact with the accurate and authentic alchemical tradition.

Thus, it is important to be aware that as the 20th century began, the true alchemical tradition was all but extinct in the Western esoteric tradition. The alchemical knowledge, and scene, we enjoy today is almost entirely due to a revival that occurred in the early 1960's. That revival can be attributed to

one individual, almost completely; a man who we know today as Frater Albertus (aka: Albert Riedel).

Frater Albertus had been a member of AMORC (The Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis), up until the the early 1960s. He had been a senior instructor in alchemy within that Fraternity, but had argued with its then Grand Master (Lewis Spence), about the role of lab alchemy instruction in AMORC. AMORC had been one of the few mainstream esoteric schools to have access to reliable alchemical teaching, but Spence had decided to 'tone down' the teaching of alchemy. In fact, that kind of training had almost been phased out, and this had got Albertus concerned. Eventually Albertus and Spence fell-out over an argument about alchemical training, whereupon Albertus made it clear ... "if AMORC won't teach alchemy, I will go and found my own school, and teach it myself".

In this way, in the early 60's, Albertus founded his school, which he originally called The Paracelsus Research Society (PRS). It is from this small beginning, in the early 60's, that the bulk of what we know today about Western Alchemy can be sourced. Before the PRS few people, even in esoteric circles, had any real idea about lab alchemy. But by the end of the 1960's, due to Albertus' teaching of the lab tradition, which he had inherited, to anyone who wanted to attend his classes, by the end of the 1960's an entirely new stream of alchemical understanding had been born.

By 1969, when my own teacher first met Albertus, he had a well established lab and student dormitory at his home in Utah. He was teaching lab alchemy in a seven-year (seven class) system, and the PRS was now known as the Paracelsus College. Albertus was not only teaching in Utah, to students who came to him from all over the world, but he taught classes in Europe, Australia and New Zealand (among other places). It was when he first came to New Zealand in 1969 that my teacher first met him. The woman who had been assigned to be

Albertus' aide de camp while here, had become ill, and the woman who would eventually become my teacher was asked to step in. So for the time Albertus was in New Zealand my teacher had been at his side the entire time, taking the prima and secunda classes here, and then travelling to Utah for the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th year classes annually, until she graduated in 1978.

During her time at Paracelsus College she had become close friends with Albertus and his wife, and had met a number of other well known Western occultists, such as Israel Regardie, at the yearly classes. Regardie, through his training with Albertus, played an important role in awakening an awareness of the true lab tradition in the Golden Dawn system, an legacy which is still developing today in the less public avenues of that Order.

Another important figure who was quietly milling around on the edge of Albertus' lab training at that time was a French gentleman by the name of Jean Dubuis. As it turned out Dubuis had a knack for the lab work. So much so that he took what he had learned from Albertus and founded his own school in France. That school was known as Les Philosophes de la Nature (LPN), and in that organisation Dubuis took the basic foundation which Albertus had laid, and developed it into the most extensive and comprehensive public lab alchemy training we know of today. Then, in the late 80's or early 90's (I'm not sure of the details), Dubuis made a connection with some avid alchemists in the USA, and through them an English language branch of Les Philosophes de la Nature was created, which was known as The Philosophers of Nature (PON).

I began my training (1988) with my teacher ten years after she graduated the seventh year class at Paracelsus College. We both became involved with the PON in the early-to-mid 90's, becoming the agents for the distribution of the PON study course in Oceania. So my own training was very much a

combination of Albertus' school and the PON take on Albertus' teachings.

So how is this all related to the Acetate Path?

One of the important things about Albertus' advanced teaching, on his seven year training course, was that it culminated in instruction in the Acetate Work. It would be safe to say that not only was Albertus almost single handedly responsible for re-birthing the lab tradition in our time, but a huge part of that revived teaching was a knowledge of the basics of the Acetate Path. So we can say that a good number of Albertus' advanced students were all familiar with Albertus' teachings on the Acetate Work.

Jean Dubuis had also become fascinated with the Acetate Work, but due to the fact that Dubuis was French, and therefore had a big attraction to the Franco-European tradition, he was personally very keen to succeed in the so-called Flamel Path. So PON's literature, and the private discussions which travelled around the PON grapevine, focused heavily on both the Acetate Path and the Flamel Work. It is ironic to note that Dubuis was quite outspoken about his strong doubts that the Acetate Path could be a success, and encouraged himself and others to put their hopes in the Flamel Work. But in the late 90's Dubuis admitted, publically, in a pseudo-documentary he made with Russ House, on the Acetate Work, that he had succeeded in producing the White Stone by the Acetate Process ... and performed a number of transmutations of base metal into white noble metals.

Apart from a few very rare source works from 17th, 18th and 19th century manuscripts, mainly out of French and German secret societies, almost everything we know of today about the Acetate Path (in its details) comes first from Albertus, then was developed by Dubuis. It would even be safe to say that without Albertus and Dubuis we would probably know next to nothing

about the alchemical use of acetates today. This is so much the case, and so recent, that less than eight years ago when I started openly attempting to discuss Acetate Alchemy on email forums, only a small handful of people watching had any idea about what I was talking about. At the same time, a good number of students of alchemy from Europe had never even heard of the Acetate Path, and argued aggressively that the entire idea was a modern invention, and complete rubbish. It was a very curious situation.

With all of this in mind, we should be aware that even though Albertus and Dubuis had a lot to say about the Acetate Path, what they said (in public) was almost entirely restricted to lab procedure, and to only the first stage of the work, up to the Dry Distillation. Almost no one has added to that body of knowledge in modern times, which has left nearly two-thirds of the Acetate work unexplained in modern literature, and undiscussed on various public forums.

Albertus and Dubuis were almost entirely silent about the history of the Acetate Work, and about its most serious literature. So while these men were responsible for awakening our attention to this Work, they did so by saying as little as possible.

What this means is that about seventy percent of what I am going to explain in the coming essays has never been heard of by modern students of this Path. Even though, you will notice, it can be found in a number of accessible texts. Here, in the coming essays you are going to read the most comprehensive description of the entire Acetate Path, not only its lab aspect, but also its history, philosophy and some of its chemistry.

ESSAY THIRTY-ONE

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (2) Metallic Oils

The work of the Acetate Path to the Stone properly begins with an understanding of the production of the so-called metallic oils via the acetic method. If we are to 'understand' the nature of the matter from which the Stone of Saturn is confected, we need to understand what these oils of metallic acetates are. That process of understanding necessarily begins with making these oils.

I teach that there are three 'orders' of so-called metallic oils. The first order are oils extracted with organic acids or alkali directly from the sulphides, oxides or carbonates of metals. An example of a metallic oil of the first order is the oil produced from metals by digesting their oxides in acetic acid, then collected by separating the 'acetate' from the metallic salt. A similar oil can be made by digesting a metallic ore in a solution of citric acid.

A metallic oil of the second order is one produced by the pyrolytic distillation of metallic oils of the first order.

Metallic oils of the third order are made by digesting metals in philosophic solvents. The most noted and highest ranking among these is philosophic Mercury which is produced from the products of the pyrolytic distillation of first order oils and which causes a metal to be 'radically' dissolved into an oil, which cannot again be reduced to a metallic salt.

The story of Acetate Path alchemy therefore begins with a knowledge of first order metallic oils.

The process of making a first order metallic oil via the acetic method is as follows: We begin most often by taking the oxide

of a metal. If we don't have access to a naturally formed oxide we can often turn a metal in to an oxide by reducing it to a powder and by heating it in the open air. So let's say for argument's sake that we are going to use metallic Lead (Pb). We can either take natural Lead Sulphide (called Galena) and pound the ore into fine crumbs and then grind it with a mortar and pestle until it is a powder, then carefully roast that powder at a low temperature in the open air. This will cause the Sulphide to convert into Lead oxide (usually litharge - PbO).

The other option is to take processed Lead metal, such as we find in old plumbing pipes or roof flashing, and melt it in a big pot. Once the Lead is melted its surface oxidizes because of its contact with the air, and the oxidized Lead can be skimmed off and collected. This sub-oxide can then be calcined until it turns a pink-red colour and becomes Lead-tetroxide (commonly called red Lead or minium - Pb₃O₄).

If we now take this oxidized Lead and macerate it in dilute acetic acid (roughly 60 percent acetic to 40 percent water), the acetic will decompose the Lead molecules and atoms of Lead will bind with molecules of acetic acid to form a compound called Lead acetate (see attached diagram).

When this happens the acid changes colour from a clear liquid to either a red colour (like red wine), or a green colour (from grass green to emerald green). When this colour change occurs it looks to the eye as if the acid has 'extracted' a tincture from the Lead oxide salts, in the same way that happens if you macerate an herb in alcohol that the alcohol changes colour as plant oils are extracted from the plant pulp. In fact, this is what many of the old alchemists instructed us was happening ... that the acetic (vinegar) was extracting a tincture from the metal oxide. This is also what many students of alchemy believe and teach today ... even though modern chemistry insists this cannot be the case, students of alchemy often insist that the chemists are fools and that alchemists through this process

know something that chemists do not. This concept of metallic tincture extraction is a wide spread belief among alchemists, and it is also what my teacher taught me.

The truth is that it isn't the chemists who are the fools. It is the alchemists who don't understand what is really happening here.

If we now take this tintured acetic acid and remove the residual Lead oxide by filtration, and then remove the excess acetic by distillation, as the acetic is distilled away the tincture concentrates and we find we are left with a red or green oil-like substance. This substance is a mixture of Lead atoms and what the old alchemists (and modern students of acetate alchemy), call ... the oil of Lead (via the acetic method). This situation is understandably deceiving, and I am going to explain why.

When Lead oxide is macerated in dilute acetic acid it can form any of a number of complex molecules, all of which come under the genre of Lead acetate. In the attached diagram we can see one of the more common compounds which are formed, which chemists call Lead di-acetate. The 'di-' part of the nomin tells us that 'two' acetic acid molecules have attached themselves to one Lead atom. The moment these acetic acid molecules latch on to the Lead atom the entire molecule changes colour. For argument's sake lets say it turns green, which is the most common reaction.

If we now reduce the maceration by distilling off the excess acetic (which is still transparent in colour), we end up with an oily green material in our boiling flask that alchemists call oil of Lead. If we wash this concentrate with water and evaporate that water, the water will help remove any residual acetic acid until our 'oil' can attain a neutral pH. If we now wash this oil in pure ethanol a curious thing happens. The ethanol breaks down the Lead acetate molecules by separating the 'acetic' part from the Lead atoms (see the bottom of the attached diagram). So now

we have on one hand a pile of Lead atoms (which looks like sticky white clay), and on the other hand we have a nice clean green tintured ethanol. We can now distill this tintured ethanol and concentrate the tincture again, to obtain a pure green oil. Because we have separated the metallic salt from this green oil, this oil is now safe to ingest, because it contains no poisonous metallic salts. (The actual method for obtaining this ingestible oil is more complicated than I explain here, although my explanation is essentially accurate. So don't try this, because if any residual salt remains in your oil and you ingest it, you will have heavy metal poisoning).

So, again, most of the old alchemists who knew of this process, described this oil as an 'extract' of the metal, and often prescribed this oil as a remedy for a number of kinds of diseases. (See Valentine's 'Triumphal Chariot'). But in fact this substance is NOT an extract of the metallic oxide.

What actually happens here is that when the two acetic acid molecules attach themselves to the Lead atom, the acetic itself undergoes a change, which we can see as a colour change (to red or green in the case of Lead). In this way we can say that the Lead salt acts as a catalyst, and alters the nature of the acetic acid, changing the acetic from a clear water-like liquid to a coloured oil-like substance. So this so-called 'metallic oil' we have obtained is actually acetic acid altered by the metallic salt. We then use ethanol as a tool to separate the catalyzed acetic acid from the metallic salt, in order to obtain not an oil which comes from a metal, but an organic compound which originated from the acetic acid itself. When we ingest this substance we are NOT ingesting a metallic extract, we are ingesting an oil which is simply an altered form of acetic acid.

In the realm of ancient and modern acetate alchemy this idea I have presented here is quite revolutionary, and I doubt anyone here will have seen this described anywhere else. I know of only two, possibly three other students of alchemy who

are aware of the true nature of this 'metallic oil of the first order'. Virtually everyone else (who is a student of alchemy) who has experimented with this kind of product, and has discussed it anywhere, believe this substance is a metallic EXTRACT.

So it is important to understand that this so-called metallic oil is actually the substance from which the Acetate Path Philosopher's Stone is made. That is, four fifths of the substances which Acetate Path alchemists take in hand to produce their Stone from, come from this catalyzed acetic acid. The remaining one fifth is the clay-like Lead Salt that is separated from the 'oil', in the ingestible oil making process.

Previously I have mentioned the fact that one of the original names for this Acetate Philosopher's Stone was 'The Vegetable Stone' ... and now we can understand why ... because a small number of the old alchemists somehow knew exactly what was really going on in this process. They knew that their Stone was not in fact produced from a metallic extract, but actually from 'vinegar' (dilute acetic acid), that had been altered by a metallic salt. They also knew that vinegar (acetic acid) had its origin in the plant kingdom, and so, they recognised that their Stone was primarily a 'vegetable' Stone.

From an alchemical point of view, though, there is more to this concept. If we macerate different metals in dilute acetic the colours and consistency of the 'oils' vary. What this means is that some difference in each metal alters the acetic in different ways. Something of the metal is (in a manner) transferred to the acid. We might even say, in esoteric lingo, that the signature of the metal is passed on to the acid, leaving its distinct mark on the acid. More than likely what happens here is that the energy (aka: Sulphur) of the metal affects the acid molecule in such a way that its geometry is changed, which in turn changes its physical properties.

Again, this understanding is immensely important, because if the Acetate Stone is in fact a transmutation agent, then from what we now know about the substances from which this Stone is made, we can safely say that a number of previously unquestioned traditional rules about what kinds of substances that are required to make a metallic transmutation agent are now busted. Our knowledge of a number of long held rules of the game now have to change. For example, it is an almost universal axiom that in order to create a transmutation agent that will transmute base metals, the agent itself must be made from a metal.

So, in order to understand where and how we begin the Great Work of producing a Philosophic Stone via the Acetate Path, we first need to understand what I have described here ... that the process begins by macerating a metallic oxide (or carbonate) in acetic acid, to produce a metallic acetate. Then the acetate compound can be decomposed in such a way as to separate the acetate part of the molecule from the metallic atom (salt). This knowledge and technique is where the Acetate Path begins ... in a manner.

There are a number of ways of producing compounds which are similar to this acetic method. For example, through the maceration of metal salts in citric acid solutions. If you have followed my descriptions, above, and understand what I have explained ... if you think about this information carefully ... when we are considering what kind of substance is required to begin the Great work, to a larger extent the chemistry of that substance is not important. That is, we are not searching for some specific substance in nature to take in hand, as so many foolish students of alchemy believe. (Generally speaking) as long as the prima materia is an organic compound (via this Path), that is all that matters. There are various ways we can obtain this kind of compound, and there are a number of metallic and mineral salts which can effectively be used as catalysts. So it is the 'condition' of the prima materia that is the

key ... not its chemical-element state that is the issue. This is one of the things that trips-up so many aspirants ... they are obsessed with finding a specific substance, rather than a particular condition of matter.

This is one of the tricks the old alchemists used to throw people off the track. They started the story that no one had ever revealed the true name of the crude matter which needs to be taken from nature to begin the work with. So on that basis most aspirants 'assumed' they were looking for some specific metal or mineral, and thereby believed that only one metal or mineral was the correct thing to begin the work with.

rubaphilos

Disclaimer: I strongly advise that you do not attempt to put the techniques I describe here in to practice unless you have a well developed experience with chemistry, or you have access to the careful instruction of someone who is intimately knowledgeable in the processes I describe herein. Many of these techniques I describe in these essays have potential risks involved, and I do not always point out those risks in my descriptions. I do not take responsibility for any injuries or damages which may occur from the practical experiment with instructions contained in this email.

ESSAY THIRTY-TWO

Acid-Base (alkali) Chemistry

Ok, so I have been asked by bhairava to explain the chemistry of how

metallic oils of the first order are produced. He specifically was

asking about the oils produced from metallic citrates, but as I have

not actually sat down and worked out the details for that path, and I

already have a detailed description of the acetate method, and it is

safe to assume the basic method for both paths is similar, I am going

to explain the acetate method and leave the individual to figure out

the rest on his or her own.

Since this explanation is a little lengthy I am going to split it into

two essays, which are addendums to essay number 30. Because I know

some of you are not very familiar with chemistry I am going to write

the first essay on acidalkali chemistry, because in order to understand the chemistry of metallic oils we first need to understand

how acids and alkalis work. So I will be describing that here in essay

'30a'. Then in essay '30b' I will explain the chemistry of metallic

oils specifically.

Acid Alkali Chemistry ...

Key to an understanding of the evolution of nature's alchemical mechanism is the role of the acid and the alkali. Generally, there is a lack of understanding (a modicum of ignorance), among many students of alchemy, concerning the importance of the subject of acids and bases, how they work and what their role in alchemy is. A good grasp of the topic is necessary if we are, in any way at all, to have a deeper insight into the nature of alchemy.

Some of the most important core concepts of alchemy involve knowledge of how common acids and bases react with different substances, and how they are the beginning of everything chemical in living systems.

Likewise, it is important to know how to recognise these common acid and alkali reactions in comparison to those of uncommon (philosophic) solvents and their effect on substances. To be as sure as I can that the greatest number of you are in a position to understand the chemical descriptions I am about to present in this set of essays, it is probably a good idea if we begin by covering some basics of chemistry, first, for those who need their memory jogged, or knowledge added to.

To begin, the novice should know that while the word 'acid' has not

changed in a very long time, the word used to describe alkalis has.

The word alkali is Arabic in origin. In relatively recent times some

enterprising chemist decided to change the Arabic alkali for the

modern term base. I personally find that the word 'base' can be

confusing, and much prefer the older term alkali.

As any high school chemistry student should be aware, modern science

has used a symbolic model of the atom to represent its structure. That

model is sometimes called the solar-system model, or the Bohr model,

(after the physicist Niels Bohr, who discovered electron shells in

1913). We now know that the atom does not look like this, but it still

serves us, at the most basic level of chemical education, as a good

model for discussing something which is hard to imagine in its

reality. Certainly, for the purpose of this discussion of how chemistry relates to the production of metallic Sulphurs, the simple

Bohr model suits us well.

Atoms, as chemistry and physics tell us, are composed of three main

parts: protons (which have a positive electric charge), neutrons

(which have no charge) and electrons (which have a negative electric

charge). Some alchemists who have chemical knowledge suggest that these three sub-atomic particles are the basic vehicles of the alchemical Principals at the atomic level of physical reality.

The protons and neutrons clump together at the centre of the atom, and make up the atomic nucleus. The electrons orbit the nucleus, and stack themselves in to what is known as electron shells. We can imagine these shells as being something like the layers of an onion. In the first shell (the one closest to the nucleus) we can have up to two electrons resident. Once that shell is full the next one accepts electrons, and it can accommodate up to eight. Once the second shell is full the third accepts electrons, any number up to eighteen, and so-on. Under normal conditions any particular atom has the same total number of electrons in its shells as it has protons in its nucleus. In this way the positive and negative charges of the atom are balanced, and the atom is electrically neutral as a unit. So this simple format is shown in the attached diagram "Basic Bohrs Oxygen Atom Model".

The number of electrons (and therefore protons) in any atom is known as its 'atomic number'. Chemists and physicists tell us that each

specific chemical element is defined by how many electrons and protons it possesses. So, for example, the chemical element of hydrogen has the atomic number of one. This means that it possesses one electron in its first electron shell, and one proton in its nucleus. See "Hydrogen Atom" in the attached diagram.

Oxygen (in contrast) has an atomic number of eight. It therefore has two electrons in its first shell (which is then full) and six electrons in its second shell, and eight protons in its nucleus. Even though this atom is electrically neutral, its second shell is not full, it can still accommodate two more electrons.

It is a good idea to keep in mind that it is firstly the number of protons in the nucleus of an atom that defines what element that atom will be. Those nucleic protons (secondly) define how many electrons need to be in its outer shells. The nucleus is a relatively fixed unit, and its proton count can not easily be changed, because the forces which hold it together are very rigid. Alternatively the electron numbers in the outer shells can be manipulated by relatively common chemical operations and natural processes because the forces which hold electrons in their orbits are relatively weak.

The outer-most shell of an atom has a special name, it is referred to as the atom's valance shell. When it comes to considering how various

atoms interact with each other, and some of the changes individual

atoms can go through, the state of the valance shell is very important.

It is the nature of atoms to want to fill their valance shells up to

their maximum limit of electrons. They do this by attracting other

atoms to themselves (through an electro-magnetic connection), in order

to share valance electrons. Chemists call this co-valant bonding. When

two or more atoms join together in this way the new unit they form is

known as a molecule. An example of how this can happen can be seen in how hydrogen atoms and an oxygen atom can join together to form a

water molecule (see "A Water Molecule" in the attached diagram).

Again, the hydrogen atom has one electron in its valance shell and it

wants one more electron to fill that shell. Oxygen wants to attract

two electrons to fill its valance shell. So, then, it is possible for

two hydrogen atoms to share their single outer electrons with the

oxygen atom. We see in the hydrogen atom on the left its single atom

(1) has linked in to the oxygen atom's valance shell, and it now

shares one of oxygen's valance electrons (2). By this sharing action

oxygen now has eight electrons in its valance shell, and hydrogen now

has two. In this way we obtain H₂O – two hydrogen atoms (H₂) joining with one oxygen (O) atom, to form one molecule of water.

In nature, because atoms have various different numbers of electrons in their valance shells, many different combinations of atoms, in-to molecules, are possible. In this way all of the substances we experience in our physical reality are composed of collections of a single type of atom, or combinations of various types of atom, and then various molecules.

All of these substances, and therefore all of the various combinations of atoms and molecules, are divided in to two basic classes by modern science: organic and inorganic matter. Because of this the modern study of university level chemistry is (at its earliest stages)divided into two subject areas: physical chemistry which concerns itself with the (fundamental) chemistry and physics of inorganic matter (and is usually taught first), and then organic chemistry which deals with the special complex field of organic molecules. Organic matter is defined by the fact that at their core all organic molecules are composed of chains of carbon (C) atoms along with different combinations of oxygen (O) and hydrogen (H) atoms attached to them.

Chemistry insists that these three atoms, in combination, are the basic building blocks of living (organic) matter.

It has been postulated by some alchemists who have knowledge of chemistry, that oxygen, hydrogen and carbon are the first atomic-molecular vehicles of the alchemical Principals, Sulphur (oxygen), Mercury (hydrogen) and Salt (carbon). If there is any validity to this theory it could only be accepted as a general rule, because organic molecules can also contain atoms of other chemical elements (which are, strictly speaking, non-organic). Also, we know (as alchemists) that all substances, including non-organic ones, are themselves composed of the three alchemical Principals, and that inorganic matter (in the chain of evolution) precedes organic matter.

It is at this point that I should repeat a statement I have made previously: that the three alchemical Principals do not possess specific chemical vehicles through which they always manifest. The Principals (which are firstly non-physical) may migrate from one chemical vehicle to another, under the right conditions, as one vehicle becomes unfit, and/or new ones become available.

Understanding how modern science views the structure of the water

molecule is half of the complete picture we need in order to understand how acid-alkali chemistry operates. So let us use a simple organic acid as an example of how the acid side of acid-alkali chemistry works. Because this acid is a solvent that I will often talk about in the Acetate Path essays, we should begin by considering the nature of acetic acid. Acetic acid is the acid that we find in common cooking vinegar. Vinegar is generally (and naturally) produced when the alcohol in wine (or beer) becomes oxidized. This most often occurs when a bacterium called acetobacter eats alcohol and converts it in to acetic acid, which it then excretes. It should also be understood that modern science, after coming to understand this much, has invented industrial methods of synthetically producing acetic acid through a number of different methods.

Because acetic acid is a complex substance the chemical formula for acetic acid can be written in various ways, in chemistry. Most commonly (and in its simplest form) it looks like this: $C_2H_4O_2$. The first thing we should notice is that this molecule is composed of carbon (C), hydrogen (H) and oxygen (O) – which shows us it is an organic molecule. In order to get some idea of what this molecule

looks like, chemists have a couple of ways they can draw stylised diagrams of it. See "The Acetic Acid Molecule" in the attached diagram, which is one of the more simple ways of depicting the acetic acid molecule.

We can see here our C₂ carbon chain (two carbon atoms at the core of the molecule), H₄ (four hydrogen atoms) and our O₂ (two oxygen atoms), and the lines which represent the electron (valence) bonds between them. (Note that one of the oxygen atoms has a double-bond with one of the carbon atoms.) Carbon has four empty slots in its valence shell, oxygen has two and hydrogen has one. With a little presence of mind we can see how that Lego concept works in the diagram.

There is a particular part of this molecule that makes it an acid, and that is the O-H portion on the right hand side. As a general rule, this O-H (oxygen and hydrogen) portion is found on all acid molecules (as defined by chemistry). So for example we see it in "Sulphuric Acid" (H₂SO₄) in the attached diagram.

The first thing we can notice about sulphuric acid is that it has hydrogen, oxygen and sulphur (S) atoms, but no carbon. Therefore this acid is not organic. It is inorganic, or what we might call a mineral

acid. Another peculiarity of this acid is that it has two O-H sites (one to the left and one to the right), which makes it a very strong acid.

Chemists have a couple of ways they describe the definition of an acid. The Bronsted-Lowry definition (for example) says ... an acid is a compound which donates a hydrogen ion (H^+) to another compound, which is a base (alkali)). In describing what this means, I am going to simplify the explanation in order to avoid creating confusion because of some aspects of the chemical view that are questionable, and complicated.

Chemists tell us that in order to activate a 100 percent concentrated acid we need to add it to water. So if we use our acetic acid as an example, let us imagine we are adding glacial acetic acid (99.999% pure acetic acid) to distilled water. Chemists tell us that as soon as we do this the 'H' (hydrogen atom) on the end of the O-H portion of the acid, breaks off from the acid molecule. (See "The Formation of an Hydronium Ion" in the attached diagram).

When it breaks free it leaves its single electron (which it was sharing with the oxygen atom) behind. If we think about this for a

moment, and consider that hydrogen only has one electron and one proton, this means that the bit that broke free is really only a proton now. (Ideally this is not possible according to the laws of physics, but it is a convenient way for chemists to explain how they believe acids work). This free hydrogen proton is now called an hydronium ion by chemists. An ion is any particle that has an electric charge to it (it is no longer electrically neutral). Remember I had pointed out that atoms normally have an equal number of protons and electrons, and this gives the atom an overall balanced charge. But now that our hydrogen atom has split, its negative charge (electron) has created a charge imbalance in the oxygen atom it was attached to. Because of this extra negative charge the entire remaining acetic acid molecule is slightly negative now. On the other hand, the hydronium ion (the hydrogen proton) is also out of balance. It is electrically positive in charge now.

If we now look back at our Bronsted-Lowry definition of an acid, we can see what it means. Our acetic acid 'donated' an H^+ to its environment (the water it is dissolved in). Even though it is not properly understood how this donated proton can happen (or even if this is really what is happening at all), what chemists do know is

that the acid solution (acetic + water) now measures as if it has an increased hydrogen ion concentration in the water. The way they represent this in chemical formula is to say that some of the water is now H_3O^+ (which is, again, chemically impossible, because oxygen atoms do not have three free slots for additional electrons in their valance shell).

The water side of the equation is not really what we are interested in though. What we (as alchemists) are interested in is the remaining condition of the acetic acid molecule, which now has a negative charge (i.e. it is a molecular ion). It is this electro-magnetic imbalance in this molecule that allows it to rip apart (dissolve) some substanceshis molecule that allows it to rip apart (dissolve) some substances put into its solution.

Acetic acid is known to be a weak acid. What this means in chemical terms is that only a small portion (about 4 percent) of acetic molecules, when added to water, have hydronium ions which dissociate.

At some point the water-acid solution knows when roughly 4 percent of hydronium ions have been created, and the acid-dissociation process stops. Different acids have different dissociation levels; strong acids (like hydrochloric acid) have extremely high hydronium

dissociation levels.

Base (alkali) reactions work in exactly the same manner, but the opposite way around. The Bronsted-Lowry definition of a base is any compound that accepts a proton (hydronium ion). (I am not going to explain that process in detail here, as anyone interested in it can research references on their own. Our concern here, at this point, is the acid reaction).

With this basic understanding of the structure and mechanics of the atom, and the acid-alkali function, we are now in a position to understand how some classes of alchemical, metallic-mineral, Sulphurs are made, which I will describe in essay 30b.

ESSAY THIRTY-THREE

The Chemistry of First Order Metallic Oils

A certain group of the old alchemists, when discussing this process, tell us that the metallic oil we obtain is 'extracted' from the metal. That is, from the metallic Salts (aka: calx). There is little doubt that when they talk about this process in this way they mean us to understand that the physical metallic oil is extracted from the physical metallic Salt. Certainly when we are familiar with the Plant Work, and how plant oils are obtained by extraction with ethanol (for example), and we look at what happens in the metallic process, we cannot help but assume that the same kind of extraction is happening (if we do not know any better). In other words it seems that when we pour acetic acid on to some metallic oxides, that the acetic is extracting an oil out of the mineral/metallic Salt. All things being considered this would appear to be a reasonable assessment of the situation, and we can understand why the old alchemists, who had no knowledge of modern chemistry or physics, and no high-tech analytic machinery, believed that this is what was happening. Indeed, today, for lack of any other explanation, most alchemists who work with and discuss metallic alchemy still talk about the extraction of metallic Sulphur-oils from their native Salts, as if it was a process similar to that which we see in the Plant Work.

But in reality this is not what happens at all. The physical oil that we obtain in a solution of ethanol, at the end of the process I have described so far in previous essays, is not a metallic extract. That oil is in fact a by-product of a catalytic reaction between the metallic salt, and the organic solvent. In fact, that oil has its origin in the acetic acid, not from the metallic salt. This is one reason why, once the salts are removed in the final stage of the oil preparation, the resulting oil is safe to ingest.

Because that oil is not metallic (chemically speaking), it is organic.

I suggest that if you understand the basic theory of the production of metallic oils you re-read the previous paragraph again, and stop and think about what I am suggesting; because herein is presented the central theme of this essay.

If you have understood everything I have explained up to this point, and you have some idea of the importance of metallic Sulphurs in the bigger picture of metallic alchemy, then you will recognise that the claim I have just made will be controversial in some quarters. The idea that much of that which has been claimed to be a metallic extract (in the past), for use in advanced metallic alchemy, is in fact not metallic, but organic. Nevertheless we should not be hasty to make judgement on this idea, because as with most things in alchemy this situation is not what it seems to be at first. So let us now consider the chemistry and physics of the production of this class of metallic Sulphurs, in detail, so that we can consider properly the exact reactions that are involved here, both from a chemical point of view, and an alchemical point of view.

For those students of alchemy that have a shaky understanding of acid-alkali chemistry, I suggest that before reading further, you re-read the essay that explains the subject (30a). I suggest this because what I am about to explain revolves around the central concept of knowledge of how acids and alkalis arise. Things are about to get a little chemically technical now, in my explanations.

When we begin the process of producing a metallic Sulphur we start with two things, the powder of a metallic oxide (for example) and the organic solvent (acetic acid, for example), that we will use to decompose that metallic powder.

Let us begin by considering a molecule of acetic acid, as it would appear in the condition called glacial acetic acid (99.999 percent concentrated acetic acid (or 17.4N molar)). We can represent the structure of that molecule as it is seen in the attached diagram "An Acetic Acid Molecule".

As I have pointed out earlier, we can tell that it is organic because it is based on a carbon chain (the two carbon atoms at its centre), as well as containing oxygen and hydrogen atoms. We can also recognise the piece of the molecule that is going to be responsible for the acid reaction, the oxygen and hydrogen atoms on the right side of the molecule.

According to the way modern chemistry describes the acid reaction, when we add water to glacial acetic acid about four percent of the acetic molecules in our flask will lose a hydrogen proton. See the attached diagram "Acetic Acid loses an Hydronium Ion".

The proton of that hydrogen atom breaks off the molecule leaving its only electron behind, attached to the oxygen atom. Because the proton is the positively charged nucleus of the hydrogen atom, that proton is no longer electrically neutral, it is now a positively charged particle (an ion). Likewise, the remaining body of the acetic molecule is also no longer electrically neutral, that extraneous electron has made it slightly negatively charged.

As soon as particles or molecules become charged (that is, they become 'ions'), they are attracted to other particles or molecules, seeking to become electrically neutral again.

So our flask has a liquid in it which has four percent of its molecules seeking compatible particles. We now add our powdered Lead oxide (lets say litharge - PbO - for argument sake). As soon as we do this the negative electric attractive charge on four percent of the acetic acid rips Lead atoms off of the granules of Lead powder. In this case each detached Lead atom will end up with two acetic acid molecules attached to it.

This new molecule is called Lead di-acetate, and is shown in the attached diagram "Lead Di-Acetate Molecule"

To keep things simple we might just call this new substance ... Lead acetate. This much is commonly understood basic, simplified, acetate chemistry. From this point we start to move away from information commonly understood by chemists, about acetates, slowly towards the realm of alchemical understanding.

Our acetic acid started life as a clear (transparent) liquid. As soon as we add Lead oxide to this solvent, and the acid decomposes the Lead molecules, and every dissociated Lead atom links with two ionized acetic acid molecules, these acetic acid molecules (attached to the Lead atom) turn either green or red in colour.

After a good deal of reading on the subject and from discussion with a number of qualified chemists, I have never found a mainstream source of information that properly explains this colour change phenomena; a lot of guesswork, but no solid explanation. At the same time I have noticed that most commercial reagent grade Lead acetate, in its solid form, has virtually no colour at all. So, industrial chemists are largely unfamiliar with this colour occurrence. It seems to mostly be a reaction that is related to 'homemade' Lead oxides and the homemade Lead acetates that are produced from them. As for my own observations of this reaction, I have noticed that generally the acetate molecule turns red when the Lead used has a lot of impurities (relatively speaking) attached to it. Acetates made from oxidised Galena (Lead sulphide) are typical of this. The green colour seems to more reliably occur when the Lead used is more pure, and has higher oxygen content (eg, PbO_2 and Pb_3O_4). That is, when it has been dissolved in acetic, filtered, concentrated via distillation and washed in distilled water, repeatedly, a number of times (for example).

Next, when we take our so-called metallic oil process to the point where we separate the oil from its Salt (see essay number 30), we notice two things. Ethanol, in this part of the process, acts like a cutting tool and breaks the weak molecular bond that exists between the acetic molecules and the Lead atom. See the attached diagram "Splitting the Lead acetate Molecule".

That is, ethanol reverses the process. The acetic molecule, now green (or red), is separated from the Lead atom (Salt), which itself is no longer the colour it was when we first introduced it to the solvent. It is now a creamy white colour of a clay-like consistency. The connection that both parts of our equation have made (the acetic molecule and the Lead atom), has altered them. Their change in colour (and other physical characteristics) is outward evidence of that inner change.

The connection they had made was an electro-magnetic one (molecular bonding). In other words, it was an energetic connection. As I have already pointed out the alchemical Principal of Sulphur is the energy aspect of the system it inhabits. This is the point where modern science becomes ancient alchemy. When the metal connected with the acid molecule the Sulphur aspect of both parts of the equation was changed. We should be aware that colour is directly associated with light. Light is a radiation of energy. Energy is heat. Heat and fire, again, are our Sulphur.

In modern physics we are told that when electrons bounce up and down the shells of their atoms, when more energy is added to the atom, or energy is removed, the atoms change colour. The different colours an atom displays when energy is added to or removed from it are indicative of the degree of energy that is added or removed. We witness this, for example, when a piece of iron is heated in a forge. The iron turns red, orange or white depending on how hot it gets ... that is, on how much energy it has absorbed from the fire. These colours are

light and heat radiation emanating from the electrons in the iron atom's electron shells.

From this we understand that in the realm of physics, when the colour of a thing changes, so has its energy state changed.

The kind of change we are considering in this acetate reaction is a (pseudo) catalytic reaction. The introduction of the metal to the acid has forced a change in the acid. Four percent of the acid has had its colour changed to green (or red), and at the same time it has taken on an oily or gummy consistency. This change in consistency would suggest that not only has the energy state been altered in the acid, but that the physical structure of that part of the acid has also changed. Physicists will tell us that a change in a molecule's energy also often coincides with a change in its geometry (its structure and shape). This in turn causes changes in the physical properties of the substance.

I should make it clear that I term this reaction pseudo-catalytic because it does not seem to conform to the strict definition of catalysis: the change in rate of a chemical reaction due to the participation of a substance called a catalyst. A catalyst is not consumed by the reaction itself. It is questionable, at this point, as to whether the change which takes part in the metal (its white clay-like consistency) could be considered as the catalyst being 'consumed' or changed by the reaction. Likewise, it is also not clear at this point as to whether the rate of change of the reaction is of the kind defined by catalysis. My knowledge of catalytic chemistry is not sufficiently developed to make this judgment. Nor has enough indepth analysis been carried out on this reaction, as far as I am aware, to satisfactorily categorise the type of reaction which is actually occurring. There is definitely room for much more technical research here.

An alchemist who knows his business would explain this state of affairs in the following way: that when an organic acid is introduced to a metallic oxide, that some of the Sulphur (energy) of the metallic Salt is transferred to the acid. That is, that metallic Sulphur has migrated to and taken up residence in the organic realm. Or alternatively, that the energy (and possibly structure) of the mineral complex has caused a change in the energy (and structure) of the acid.

The so-called metallic oil is not metallic at all (chemically). It had its origin in the vegetable kingdom (acetic acid comes from the oxidation of ethanol). But we need to remember that the oil is the vehicle for the Sulphur Principal, it is not the Sulphur itself. So, that which began life as an organic substance, derived from the vegetable kingdom, is now alchemically considered metallic ... or more accurately, to hold the energetic signature (and possibly structural signature) of the metallic realm.

So while the oil is not extracted from the metal, the Sulphur is. In other words, in this process, what the old alchemists had discovered was a way to manipulate metallic Sulphur (energy), for the purposes of their Great Work, via an organic medium. This concept, of the use of organic solvents in mineral operations, is of the utmost importance to advanced alchemy.

Because of this theory it is sometimes insisted by alchemists that mineral acids (non-organic acids) have no real place in alchemy (or at least cannot have alchemical effect), because the 'trick' in alchemy involves organic acids (at least to a certain degree), and other organic based solvents. Other alchemists, in their typical confusing manner, called mineral-metallic preparations, which were manipulated with organic solvents 'vegetable' preparations. Hence, a Stone, for example, made via the Acetic Path, was termed the vegetable Stone.

Once we understand this much, we are now capable of solving all kinds of other enigmas that exist concerning the real nature of aspects of metallic alchemy. Some old myths can be busted, and some bright new concepts can be realised. At the same time we get, for the first time, possibly, a clear look at the real relationship between alchemy and modern science, and understand that in fact science has all (or almost all) of the pieces of the puzzle, and the language to discuss alchemy, but not the vision to piece them together ... yet.

ESSAY THIRTY-FOUR

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (3) The Crude Matter

Anyone who has studied alchemy for a reasonable amount of time will tell you that one of the biggest secrets that students of the Great Work concern themselves with is knowledge of the substance alchemists take in hand to begin the work with. For the sake of clarity I refer to this substance as 'the crude matter'. Whatever we might think about this subject, at the very start of the work some substance, that is found in nature somewhere, has to be taken in hand in order to begin the work.

Probably the most well known statement about the crude matter is that ... "nobody has ever revealed its true name". Most students of alchemy become aware of this idea, and most of them also accept that statement without ever really thinking seriously about whether or not the claim is a reasonable one.

There are at least two problems with the claim that the crude matter has never been openly revealed. The first problem is that the statement is worded in such a way that it presupposes that there is only one substance from which the Philosopher's Stone can be made. Yet, every serious student of alchemy is aware that there are a good number of 'Paths' to the Stone, most of which use a different substance from each of the other Paths as their source material. The second problem with the statement is that nobody could be so familiar with every piece of information published about the Great Work that they could be sure nobody ever openly named the crude matter. Reason also dictates that, since it is difficult enough to get half a dozen people living in the same time, who speak the same language and come from similar backgrounds to agree strictly on anything, the idea that numerous people who speak various languages and are separated by time, location and cultural

background, would agree to keep a single secret for more than 2000 years, is just highly unlikely.

In this way, when considering the question of what the crude matter is in the Acetate Path, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the truth of the answer to this question has been published in the past.

When considering what the crude matter of the Acetate Path might be, the old Adepts left us a number of clues. One of the more well known being the name "Opus Saturni" (The Work of Saturn). It is generally accepted this 'Saturn' refers to the true nature of the crude matter.

The concept 'Work of Saturn' is a qabalistic device. That is, it is a kind of cypher, using qabalistic symbology for the purpose of concealing the common name of the substance taken in hand to begin this work. Esoteric alchemists hoped that by veiling the name of the crude matter in this way, the only kind of alchemist who would be in a position to recognise the symbolism would be one who had studied Qabala. That device might therefore minimize the number of mere treasure hunters and exoteric 'chemists' who came to the work, from figuring it out.

There are basically two camps of opinion about exactly what 'Saturn' really refers to. One camp insist that Saturn refers to the metal Lead (Pb), since in Qabala Lead and the planet Saturn are both referred to the same sephira on the tree of life (Binah). The second camp is made up of individuals who are united by the single belief that whatever the crude matter of this Path is, it is 'not' Lead. In this camp there are a number of beliefs about what the alternative might be, ranging from the absolutely absurd, to the somewhat plausible. In my opinion the most plausible belief in the second camp is that the crude matter is the semi-metal Antimony (Sb). There are a number of reasons for that choice, the most obvious being that in a small

number of Acetate Path texts the word Antimony is used openly (in various guises). The least used reason being that there is a little known Qabalistic doctrine that states that the semi-metal Antimony is attributed to the sephira Malkuth, and is sometimes referred to as 'the little Saturn'. Virtually the only argument against the use of Lead is that it is too commonly referred to by the old acetate alchemists. In other words, because it is believed the true name has never been published, and since the word Lead appears in several texts, the crude matter cannot therefore be Lead. Again, the validity of this statement rests primarily on the presumption that the crude matter is a secret.

It is possible, for example, that both of these substances (Lead and Antimony) are candidates, as they are probably the most common substances presented in classic Acetate Path texts as being the crude matter, either individually, or together. A perfect example of this situation is found in Ripley's Bosome Book, where he opens the first chapter with: ... "First take 30 pound weight of Sericon or Antimony...".

For the few individuals who are aware of the use of the word sericon in Acetate texts, there has been a degree of debate about its meaning. But it isn't difficult to find the solution to that riddle. An author by the name of Paul of Taranto (13th century), who was also an alchemist, wrote a book known as the 'Theorica et Practica', which largely was an argument for the validity of lab alchemy, at a time when knowledge of alchemy was first filtering in to Europe from the near East. In his book Paul uses the word Sericon as a rough translation for the Arabic zariqun, or sariqun – which is Arabic for Lead oxide. Since Paul of Taranto's translation it has been common for alchemists of the Acetate Path to call the crude matter of their work 'Sericon'.

While Ripley gives no clue as to what he means by 'Antimony', if he is speaking literally then he is not giving us any idea as to how that mineral needs to be prepared, if at all. But by giving us the term Sericon we can deduce enough to be able

to move to the next stage of the work ... because he is not simply saying 'use Lead' (which would leave us guessing what form of Lead), but he specifically states we need to begin with Lead oxide.

There is a helpful reference to the true nature of Sericon, and that is in John Heydon's 'The Wise Man's Crowne' (and by extension 'The Rosie Crucian Secrets', which contains sections of Heydon's work.). There, the author of the process not only assures us that Sericon is red Lead oxide, but he tells us his preferred method of preparing it:

“But that the body may be prepared according to this Table and after my intention and the desire of Ripley, we both will that the oil or Water of Paradise be drawn out of the Gum of Sericon (whose father is Adrop). Sericon is made of red Lead; therefore it is first necessary to show the way of making Minium of Lead. Take ten or twelve pounds of Lead and melt it in a great iron vessel as plumbers use to do; and when it is molten, stir it still with an iron spatula till the Lead be turned to powder, which powder will be of a green colour. When you see it thus, take it from the fire and let it get cool and grind that powder upon a marble till it be impalpable, moistening the powder with a little common Vinegar till it be like thick honey, which put into a broad earthen vessel and set it on a trevet over a lent fire to vapour away the Vinegar and dry the powder and it will be of a yellow colour. Grind it again and do as before, till the powder be so red as red Lead, which is called Adrop. And thus is Saturn calcined into red Lead or Minium.”

Heydon tells us a number of helpful things in this passage. He makes it clear that Lead oxide is Sericon, and that he is referencing Ripley's use of the term. He also makes it clear that Ripley's Water of Paradise (Mercury) is drawn from a gum made from the oxide of Lead. He also tells us clearly that Sericon has also been called Adrop, an explanation which I have never seen anywhere else, and a word which is for the

most part a mystery to most students of alchemy. Lastly, he explains that the cypher 'Saturn' represents Lead oxide. With all of this we are not left guessing about anything, and no clearer explanation exists anywhere else in alchemical literature that I am aware of, of the true nature of the crude matter of the Acetate Path.

I should also point out here that there is a common confusion between the term 'Prima Materia' and 'Crude Matter'. It is often taken for granted that the Prima Materia (first matter) is the first thing taken in hand to begin the work. This misunderstanding arises from the oft repeated phrase ..."we must first know how to obtain the Prima Materia before our work can begin" [my paraphrase]. It is understandable that students of the art, who are unfamiliar with the quirks of the use of alchemical language, believe that what is being referred to here is the first substance to take in hand. But it is not.

The Great Work is a mimicking of the work of creation. Creation begins when the Elements from which physical reality is composed are drawn out of the Primal Chaos. Alchemists referred to this Chaos, or Hyle, as the First Matter, because it is the very ground-bed from which creation has its existence.

In the laboratory, then, when we have the crude matter in hand, in order to begin the Great work, we first have to retrograde that crude substance back to Prima Materia, or Chaos of the Philosophers. Until we learn how to perform this reverse engineering of the crude matter, we cannot reach the 'start' of the Great Work. Therefore, the crude matter and the first matter are not the same thing.

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ESSAY THIRTY-FIVE

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (4) The Gum of Sericon

We have learned in the previous essay that the first process in the Acetate work is actually CALCINATION. Calcination of the metal into its oxide state.

The second process (in the traditional old method) is DISTILLATION. That is, distillation of vinegar to produce a more concentrated acetic acid. Today we have a choice between producing our first solvent from the distillation of natural vinegar, or simply to dilute commercially produced acetic acid. Some individuals, though, insist that this work can only succeed if natural vinegar is used and concentrated either by distillation or freezing. The theory this 'natural-is-best' belief is based on is that natural vinegar has in it 'vegetable life', and that this vegetable life needs to be transferred to the matter from which the Stone is made.

There are two problems with the vegetable life theory. The first is that nobody has ever proved that this mysterious thing exists, can be captured and transferred to the material from which the Stone is made. The second is that there is no substantial tradition ... no obvious and pervasive teaching, in acetate alchemy literature that supports this theory.

Jean Dubuis was a big supporter of the vegetable life theory, and it might be said that he was the guy who made it popular through the PoN lab lectures. He claimed (first) that if the acetate Stone was real that it required this vegetable life through the use of 'living' vinegar. But later, when he succeeded in making the white Stone, and performed transmutations with it, but could never push his Stone to the red stage, he changed his theory and insisted (contrary to tradition) the acetate Stone

couldn't in fact reach the red stage because of the vegetable life that was part of its matrix. (This in fact is not the case, because I have seen the red stage of the acetate Stone).

So the idea that vegetable life exists as a transferable condition, that the acetate Stone requires it, and that it needs to be added to the process through the use of natural vinegar, is simply a modern theory, based on the whole 'life substance' superstition (which I refer to as the magic bullet theory).

We know from reliable traditional sources that ... "our materia has in it all that is required for the work" ... [my paraphrase] ... and so the whole idea that some magic substance or condition needs to be added from outside is simply contrary to long time Hermetic Philosophy.

We also know that this idea that synthetic acetic is of no use is a modern theory (and on that basis alone it is automatically suspect), because there simply is no way that anyone working the acetate path before the invention of synthetic acetic acid (1845) was going to say ... "synthetic acetic has no value in our work" ... simply because that substance didn't exist. In fact glacial acetic was produced as early as the 1500's by distilling copper acetate, and it was an acceptable product to be used in alchemy.

The acetic acid we choose to use (whether from a natural or a synthetic source), then needs to be used at a dilution, not at pure strength (glacial condition). So commercial glacial needs to have enough water added to it to produce at least a 40/60 acid/water solution, while the natural vinegar is either distilled or freeze-separated to at least the same dilution. Some acetate alchemists insist that a 60/40 acid/water dilution is best.

Now that the metal is prepared as either litharge (Lead monoxide PbO) from Lead sulphide (galena), or as minium (Lead tetroxide Pb_3O_4), from metallic Lead, it can be added to

our prepared acetic acid for the next stage - DIGESTION. Ripley's instruction is to dissolve 1 pound of oxide in 1 gallon of twice distilled vinegar. (Roughly 500gms to 4 litres).

This mixture should then either be circulated (boiled in a closed circulatory), or warmed and stirred regularly, in order to force and speed up the chemical reaction, which produces Lead acetate.

This solution then needs to be filtered to remove all solids (primarily undissolved Lead), and we thus obtain a green or red tintured liquid which is a compound of water (H₂O), acetic acid, and Lead acetate.

Now we want to separate the excess water and acetic acid from the acetate, and we do that by a combination of distillation and evaporation. We can distill the bulk of the water and acetic off the acetate by normal means (I usually use a sand bath), until about 1/3rd of the volume remains, or until a crusty ring of salts forms around the inside of the flask at the level of the surface of the liquid. Then the remaining excess liquid should be distilled in balneo, so as to minimise the risk of decomposing the acetate molecules through over heating. Then when the remaining thick liquid is still wet enough to be poured out of the flask, I stop the distillation, allow it to cool, then pour the residue into an evaporating dish and dry it in a sand bath at 30oC, outdoors.

The result is a crude part-sticky part-crusty Lead acetate that still has some residual water and acetic mixed with it. That residual acetic must be removed, and we do that by re-adding distilled water to the coagulated acetate, enough to simply redissolve the entire mass into a manageable liquid. Then I re-digest this liquid in a sealed jar at 30oC for a couple of days, re-filter it to remove the impurities that precipitate, and then re-evaporate this liquid until it is sticky-dry again.

This dissolving - digesting - filtering - evaporating - can be repeated until the liquid state is neutral pH, and no impurities precipitate during digestion. That can take as many as a dozen repetitions of this cycle. The product we now have is the same product we are looking for when we make a metallic oil of the first order via the acetic method. If we now take this substance and macerate it in pure ethanol, that ethanol will separate the tintured acetate from the clay-like Lead. But we aren't going to go in that direction here. That is, we are not going to separate the acetate from its salt. In the next stage we want to distill the acetate off the salt, and this will allow us to produce a number of completely new substances that don't exist right now in our Lead acetate.

At the end of this dissolving, digesting, filtering, re-crystallization process you will have a very pure Lead acetate of neutral pH that is amorphous (doesn't shoot spiky crystals during evaporation). It will be wax-like to the touch (but you shouldn't handle this without gloves, because it contains Lead).

At this point the old acetate alchemists called this substance by many names, among which were: the gum of sericon (a gum made from Lead oxide), our saturnian herb (a green vegetable based material made from Lead), the green lion, our unripe gold, our chaos, our prima materia.

This Lead acetate was referred to as the prima materia because it is the true 'beginning substance' from which the Great Work is started. Everything we need now to make the Philosopher's Stone is inside this Lead Acetate. Nothing needs to be added, only what is superfluous is removed (impurities).

It was called the green lion because the lion, being the king of the animal kingdom, was the symbol often used to represent the Stone itself, the king of the mineral kingdom. Green, because like green fruit it is as yet unripe ... and by the heat of

the athanor it will be brought to ripeness (redness, or the red lion).

Technically, and ideally, if you now took this pure Lead acetate and sealed it in a circulatum, and heated it enough to keep it in a molten state, (280oC), for several years, you would eventually have your Stone. But we don't want to wait several years. So the old alchemists learned ways of manipulating their gum of sericon in order to drastically speed up that ripening process. These tweaks are what we refer to as ... The Great Work.

Up to this point we have now used various chemical operations. Calcination, distillation, digestion (or maceration), coagulation, solution, filtration and crystallisation.

Now we have our prima materia ... our first earth, which we are going to make ... without form, and void ... (water-like) ... upon which we will see a spirit move ... in the next stage.

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ESSAY THIRTY-SIX

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (5) The Elements out of Chaos

Now we come to the description of the destructive distillation of our gum of sericon.

This srage of the acetate path alone, I personally feel, is the most significant process in the entire arsenal of alchemical operations. Even if the claim that the Acetate Path produces a working transmutation agent are not true, this path contains within it the most accurate and indepth model of 'ancient' Hermetic teaching of all alleged Paths to the Stone.

The mechanical chemistry and physics of destructive distillation conforms neatly to the alchemical philosophic ideal. The philosophic analysis of this process conforms perfectly to the deepest and most serious Hermetic concepts about creation and the structure of matter. It is not merely a chemical operation. it is also a model of universal process, and a tool for teaching the most sacred Hermetic principles. It is hard proof what that which the ancients understood concerning the true nature of reality, as well as being a strong argument for the ancientness of the alchemical tradition. Understanding the process of destructive distillation provides a window into the mind of the ancient and classic period alchemist, and as we know success in lab alchemy requires us to be able to think like an alchemist ... not like a chemist.

The basic legend of creation, as seen in the creation myths of many ancient cultures, begins with a state of void, an ocean of chaos, and darkness. From this primordial state (which is considered as a unified field of potential), the basis of binary reality arises. The male and female. The positive and negative poles of the binary. The alchemist's Sun and Moon. Each pole

of this binary, too, is a binary being ... in this way four conditions arise from the primordial chaos, and alchemists call these conditions the four Elements.

We begin the destructive distillation of our gum of sericon by filling a boiling flask no more than half way with the pure acetate. We then rig a distillation system just like the one we have been discussing here for the Hollandus Plant work. We carefully raise the heat by degrees, and when we reach around 270oC, the wax-like Lead acetate melts like butter. As the green gum warms the heat ripens it, and it turns a brown-red colour. Then as it melts completely it turns liquid, and to look at it in the boiling flask it looks exactly like water at this stage. If you don't heat it to boiling point it sits there still, like limpid clear water. This is now our earth, or prima materia, 'without form'. As it digests, the molecules in its mass begin to decompose, break apart, and the atoms which make up those molecules end up as a chaotic soup. In this watery chaos four things exist, from a chemical point of view: (1) Lead atoms, (2) carbon atoms, (3) hydrogen atoms and (4) atoms of oxygen, in various piece-meal combinations.

As we raise the heat, slowly, some of these atoms break free from the watery chaos and fly up into the upper atmosphere of the boiling flask. At first this looks like a mist floating over the surface of the 'water'. Then as the heat rises this mist condenses, drips down through the condenser, and collects in the receiving flask.

At first water (H₂O) condenses. Then the mist thickens and becomes a white smoke, and at that point acetone is being produced by the mist cooling and the atoms of carbon, oxygen and hydrogen re-bonding in to acetone. That white smoke is the true chaos of the alchemists, because it is a gas cloud of ionized particles. From this true chaos new substances can now be created ... beginning with, as I have said, acetone. When

organic matter begins to break down, acetone is almost always the first product of that decomposition.

For some time that white fume continues, then eventually a red-orange fume rises. The Chaos of ionised particles now form substances different from acetone, which together always look like a yellow-red oil. Exactly what organic substances form this red oil depends on a number of variables. The size of the flask, the amount of matter filling the flask, the degree of heat and the speed the heat is increased, plus the metal or mineral used to form the acetate. The exact chemistry of these complex oils is not an issue in alchemy. All that matters is the basic condition of this substance ... its 'oiliness' and the fact it is part spirit and part solid ... like all alchemical Sulphur.

Once this red fume has subsided the process is complete. At the very least, when the distillation stops, we have collected four substances out of the chaos:

a mb

This is the conventional view ... which is not the esoteric view...

Elemental Water: (Water)

Elemental Air: (Acetone, which is a gas at room temperature)

Elemental Fire: (the oil)

Elemental Earth: (Lead - residue and sublimate)

This is the basic understanding of the destructive distillation stage of the Acetate Path. Most people who concern themselves with study of the Acetate Work are reasonably well aware of these basics, to this point. But very few people know much at all about the philosophy behind this stage, and few people (maybe only a dozen or so) have any realistic idea, based on experience, of the lab processes beyond this point.

As for the philosophy behind this destructive distillation phase, the fundamentals should be easy enough to grasp.

The old alchemists taught that the lab process was a model of the macrocosmic process of creation. That all things begin in a state of chaos, and that the first state of that Chaos was a viscous water. Many alchemical philosophers make this very clear in their writings. For Acetate alchemists that proto-chaotic water is the metallic acetate in fusion. When heat is awakened in this watery chaotic prima materia it converts into a mist, and we are told of ancient times that this mist, or spirit, contains the Four Elements from which all life has its origin. When this mist condenses we find four substances have been produced, as described previously.

The deeper and more curious idea that needs to be grasped here is this ... that if any organic matter is burnt (pyrolytic distillation), its many combinations of molecules break apart, when again cooled, and recondensed form only two main substances ... a flammable spirit and a red-yellow oil. The water and the minerals that are the other two products of this process are essentially unchanged by the fire.

What this tells us (when viewing this process Hermetically) is that no matter how complex the original organic substance is in its natural state, once it is decomposed by fire all of that complexity always results in four substances ... two that don't change, and two that are always made by fire (the spirit or Mercury, and the oil or Sulphur). Therefore, there is some natural law governing this pyrolytic mechanism which always forces the chaos of ionized particles of oxygen, hydrogen and carbon to always rearrange in the same types of combination. Why does this happen when, ideally, that cloud of ionized particles could re-join to form any number of 100s of common organic molecules?

When the old alchemists watched this process, and asked themselves the same question (obviously without the chemistry), their conclusion was that essentially, at their root, all things could be reduced to Four basic conditions, and that these Four conditions were in fact two binaries, expressing themselves.

While there is no doubt that in later centuries, as alchemy evolved, and more people contemplated and wrote about this process, a lot of guesswork that is not accurate was added to the core philosophy. For example, many alchemists, after performing the destructive distillation, automatically assumed that the white and red fumes actually came out of the metal ... and were therefore naturally trapped inside the metal. This led them to claim that in the bowls of the earth these fumes exist, and that all metals and minerals were produced from them. Today we know this is not the case. But it does not change the undeniable fact that when all organic matter is reduced by fire, nature herself allows that matter to be reduced to only Four 'Elements'. In this way it is quite accurate to suggest that when the complexity of organic matter is removed, and all its substance is reshuffled by nature into its least number of combinations, that there are only Four combinations.

This entire concept is, therefore, of deep significance in the entire canon of Hermetic thought ... since the idea of the Four Elements and the Three Principals is the most fundamental of esoteric concepts ... upon which everything else is built. And here in this process we can actually experience, contemplate and see how the ancients may very well have founded and built up their theories on this subject.

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ESSAY THIRTY-SEVEN

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (6) Separating the Elements

At the end of the destructive distillation, if we have not deliberately changed receivers in order to catch each product (each fraction of the distillation) separately, then in our first receiving flask we now have a mixture of Four substances. Water (H₂O), a yellowish oil (sometimes floating, sometimes dissolved), acetone (a clear flammable spirit), and in the boiling flask a black dry residue. Additionally, we probably, but not necessarily, also have sublimated salt of Lead (Pb).

Often when we read descriptions by the old alchemists of this part of the process, we note that they most often do not swap receivers. They collect everything in one receiver. This was probably more to do with practicality than with intention. In previous centuries boiling flasks had to be luted to receivers, so breaking that seal in the middle of a destructive distillation, to swap receivers, would have been messy and probably a little foolhardy. Today it is possible to swap receivers simply because our glassware technology makes it possible to do so.

When considering the next stage of this work, the separation of the so-called Elements, one from the other, for simplicity sake it is probably easiest to continue on the premise that all the distillate products have been collected together.

In consideration of our intention, now, to separate each of the products of the destructive distillation from each other ... our first product has already been isolated at the end of the destructive distillation ... that is, the black sooty residual mineral mass that remained behind in the boiling flask at the end of the destructive distillation. To look at this substance is completely and uniformly soot-black. Chemically it is composed primarily of

the Lead atoms that are left behind after the ionized organic particles of the acetate are distilled away. The Lead atoms are largely too heavy to be distilled up into the condenser. So they stay laying on the bottom of the boiling flask. I say ... largely ... but not completely. Because we know from experience that some of the Lead atoms rolling around in the liquid chaos hitch a ride on the back of some of the volatile organic particles, and thus 'sublimate' and end up stick to the inside surface of the upper region of the boiling flask, looking (often) like a pink hard wax. Ripley refers to this as a ryme.

The black residue is black not from the Lead itself, but because during the destructive distillation the chemical element carbon is also more-or-less too heavy to lift away from the chaos. Obviously some of it does, because most of the distillate product itself is organic (is composed of oxygen, hydrogen and carbon atoms). But a good deal of the carbon stays stuck to the Lead, coating it in a black soot. Ripley calls this product "Our Black Dragon".

It is helpful to understand that in Frater Albertus' schema of the alchemical process, this black residue would be referred to as the Principal 'Salt', in its crude form. As I progress with my description of this work you will see that the old Masters of this work had other ideas about how the Elements and Principals were attributed to the products of the destructive distillation ... and these differences make a serious difference in how we understand the entire work.

The distillate is now placed in a new boiling flask (my personal preference is a retort). A conventional distillation system is set up and the receiver is packed in ice. Applying heat to the boiling flask will first bring over that which alchemists call a volatile spirit. A transparent, volatile, flammable organic fluid. To chemistry this substance is known as acetone. The liquid mass that this acetone was distilled away from (the original product of our destructive distillation)) also contains a

complex of organic oil-like substances, some of which are volatile and will distill with this acetone, effectively uniting with it.

The receiver is now unhooked and quickly the acetone distillate is decanted into its own jar and sealed air tight. Ripley calls this substance ... "Our Ardent Water" ... from the Latin ardent - a stem of ardens, present participle of ardere "to burn". He also calls it ... "Our Water Attractive", but the reason for this definition he does not make so obvious.

A new receiver is hooked up to our distillation train and the distillation is continued, in balneo. The next substance to come over the still head is water (H₂O). Again, a little of the oil-like substance adheres to and comes over with this water. Ripley calls this water ... 'The Flood' ... an obvious biblical reference. Again, the receiver is removed and this water is decanted in to and stored in its own sealed flask.

Once The Flood is removed Ripley tells us ... "there remain[s] in the bottom of the Still, a thick Oily substance like unto liquid Pitch". This is a very important statement, because it appears elsewhere, in other key texts, by other authors, that are related to the Acetate Path. But usually when this 'pitch-like' substance is discussed by acetate alchemists they mention it in very cryptic terms. This tells us something important.

This oil-like substance is composed of a complex of different organic molecules. Often there are roughly nine substances that can be identified by gas chromatography and mass spectrometry as ingredients of the 'oil' fraction of the destructive distillation of Lead acetate. Among these substances are, for example, phenols and some esters. While this information might be of interest to chemists, it makes absolutely no difference to an alchemist's understanding. What an alchemist wants to understand about this oil-like substance is how it contributes to the production of the Stone ... and we will start to look at the secrets hidden there in the next couple of essays.

Now we have the Four products of the destructive distillation separated the one from the other.

The Ardent Water (acetone)

The Flood (common H₂O)

The Pitch-like Oil, (phenols and esters, etc), and

The Black Dragon (Lead and carbon)

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ESSAY THIRTY-EIGHT

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (7) Purifying the Sun and the Moon

Once the four primary products of the destructive distillation are separated one from the other, and contained, we are at the end of THE FIRST WORK which is SEPARATION.

Now we begin the SECOND WORK which is PURIFICATION of these four substances.

Ripley kind of confuses this clear division of the first and second works by describing the separation steps mixed up with the first steps of purifying the four substances. As I have mentioned earlier everything up to this point in the work is reasonably well understood. From here some of the pieces of the next steps are well understood too ... but there is some confusion caused between that which we might call the 'Albertus' approach and the 'Ripleian' approach to labeling the products of the destructive distillation, and with how to deal with them.

Many of us have worked the alchemical plant process which Frater Albertus designed and made famous as the fundamental approach to dealing alchemically with plant matter. Today this work is often called the 'plant simple' process, and many novices work at producing seven tinctures from plants by this process, one plant attributed to each of the old planetary forces. What many students of alchemy don't realise, though, is that in learning this process they are really accepting a very particular philosophy about alchemy, which was quite specific to Frater Albertus, and is hard to find anywhere else in alchemical literature before his time.

If we look at the attached diagram 'attributing-the-elements.jpg', on the left side we can see roughly the scheme Albertus was teaching. In his work we manipulate four substances, and we can see how these four substances can be referred to as being the Elements of alchemical philosophy, but also as the three Principals. Since I originally I produced this diagram for one of my students I have also included a list of attributes of the Qabalistic Partzufim (archetypes), showing how a system such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn would connect the primary Qabalistic archetypes of the Elements. Anyone sufficiently familiar with Qabala will immediately recognise how that works. I included this for my student because, naturally, our discussion involves a constant comparison between outer lab practices and ideas with inner psychological practices and ideas. I'm not going to elaborate on the inner side here, since our focus is on the acetate path itself. But if anyone is curious, please ask, and I will explain, because anyone who is adequately familiar enough with these ideas will recognise some curious differences between the partzufim attributes in the conventional system to the alternative view I teach to my students.

On the right side of the diagram we see Ripley's attributes of Elements to substances, and there is a major difference in his system, which throws some light on a very important secret which Albertus' system does not. We need to understand these differences as we start in to the PURIFICATION phase of the work, because I believe the confusion that can be had here is responsible for a lot of the fumbling and inability to get past the purification phase, that most people working this process experience.

Ripley does not attribute 'Earth' (Element) and therefore 'Salt' (Principal) to the residual solid left behind in the boiling flask. He calls this substance simply 'Our Basis' and 'The Black Dragon'. And he talks about it from this point on as if it plays a role outside of the Elements and Principals ... almost as if it is

(to use an old analogy) a field in which the Elements are sown, to germinate. Indeed, our foliated earth.

Alternatively, he gives the attribution of Earth/Salt to that which Albertus calls Sal Sulphurus (Salt of Sulphur). Albertus sees Sulphur as being a substance divided in two, part fixt and part volatile. Ripley sees the Fixt part of Sulphur as being a specific Element in its own right.

Now let's look at how the four products are purified.

The Basis:

This substance is simply carbon and Lead. The preferred way of starting to purify this was first to powder the residue, spread it as a thin layer on an iron or cermaic plate and drop a hot coal at one edge. The carbon would take light and burn like embers spreading across the black powder, calcining the Lead as it goes, turning the Lead again into a number of its oxides. So instead of that black residue we have now a rainbow coloured powder. Most acetate path alchemists will now take part of this and redissolve it in acetic, and by this way make more gum of sericon to work with. Basically, recycling the residue.

Another portion of this oxide they would describe as being calcined to a white salt in a reverbatory furnace. By this means, they tell us, when we have a snow white salt out of this rainbow coloured Lead oxide, we now have 'our basis' pure. we see later that Ripley gives us an important piece of information in that he labels this pure saline substance 'Sulphur of Nature'.

But anyone who has tried this will know that the description of this reverbatory calcination is made to look simple, but is far, far, from being so. If in fact it is possible to produce a snow white salt by reverberation alone, it takes a huge amount of energy (very high temp), and a long time. So this very common description of how to purify this salt is really a blind. It is really

designed to stump the novice, and cause him to give up simply because he either can't afford the cost and time of calcining the residue, or to give up out of frustration of not being able to attain a pure enough product.

There are a couple of very rare instances, in classic literature, though, that point out to us that in fact those who were 'adept', knew other secret ways of pushing this salt to its required snow white state, with a minimal effort and expense.

Next, we need to purify the Mercury/Air, which is the acetone. The method is simple enough, and is not much more difficult than purifying ethanol. The acetone is simply distilled seven times. There is a problem here though, in that the more pure the acetone gets, the more highly volatile it gets. By the fourth distillation it will be so volatile that if you remove the receiver from you distillation train, and leave it open for a few minutes, most of the acetone will evaporate. By the seventh distillation it is so volatile it will boil at 30oC, which means if you pour a little in the palm of your hand it will literally boil in your hand. (This is our menstruum which ... "does not wet the hands"). So a special distillation system has to be devised that will allow the seven distillations without exposing the distillate to the open air. Then the final product has to be transferred to its storage jar similarly, and sealed hermetically, so that 'Our Eagle' does not take to the air and escape.

Finally there is the Sulphur. This is the most curious part to purify, and the most complicated.

When we have the entire complex distillate right after the destructive distillation, we first remove the acetone by careful distillation in balneo.

Then we remove the Water (Flood) by distillation, in balneo, too.

This leaves us with a sticky black tar-like oil as a residue in the bottom of the boiling flask. This is a mixture of both volatile Sulphur and Fixt Sulphur (Ripley's Elemental Earth).

Assuring this tar-like substance is dry (free from Water) we now take our 7x purified Mercury (our Ardent Water purified) and pour it onto the tar-like substance. The acetone will dissolve the most volatile portion of the Sulphur, and we can then decant that tincture and save it sealed up. This process might need to be repeated until the acetone won't tincture any more.

This tinctured acetone Ripley calls 'our Man's Blood'

Then we now add back our Flood, and digest it on the tar. This Water will now draw-off the water-soluable part of the Sulphur. The Water can be likewise decanted and stored. We will now have left as a residue, the fixt part of the Sulphur, which we will now reverberate till it is a snow white Salt.

Ripley speaks sparingly about this Salt, and he doesn't tell us what its real name is, but anyone who has 'eyes to see' what is really going on in the steps after this essay will realise this Salt is in fact the 'Secret Fire' of the alchemists. The 'Ignis Sapientum'. Without this Fire being collected and prepared properly, nothing past this point will work at all ... and the novice student will believe that all of the punch has been taken out of his work, and an impenetrable stone wall has been reached.

In all the years I have read about the acetate path, discussed it with people, and taught the process, I have recognised less than half a dozen people (outside of the group I teach in) who had any accurate idea at all of how to get beyond this point. Accurate descriptions of what happens past this point are extremely rare in classic alchemical literature, and most acetate path alchemists had no idea of where to find those references until I started mentioning them online about ten

years ago. I have never seen anyone discuss what is ahead with any even remotely realistic idea of what is required.

So from this point in my essays we literally enter in to the unknown (for those not communicating with someone who already knows). Where ideas most students of alchemy are far to shy to attempt talking about in public ... and a number of the most serious secrets whispered about ... now become obvious to those who understand the concepts and practices involved.

We now have a pure 'basis' [Foliated Earth]

A pure Mercury [Air]

Pure Sulphur partly dissolved in our pure Mercury and partly dissolved in Water [Fire]

And a pure Salt (as the fixt part of sulphur) [Earth]

The Water is now discarded [Water]

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ESSAY THIRTY-NINE

Different Paths to the Stone

Thanks to John and Bhairavah for their posts on the subject of different Paths to the Stone. What follows is my understanding of this subject, which is a little more complex. I have changed the numbering of this essay so as not to interrupt the numbering of the acetate essays.

Over the years of watching discussions on the subject of Paths to the Stone, I have long taught that in our time there are three Paths which are most commonly practiced and discussed today. In fact, I have rarely seen anyone discuss and other approach outside of these three:

1: The Regulus of Antimony (Also known as the Flamel Path).

I first heard about this Path back when I was a member of PoN (in the early 1990's). It was discussed among PoN students because it was the favorite approach for the French alchemist Jean Dubuis. It might even be suggested that it was Dubuis who popularised knowledge of this Path outside of Europe.

Dubuis liked to call this the Flamel Path, but I understand that there was some argument against this concept, on the basis of some scholarly research which suggested the Regulus of Antimony was not the Path Flamel worked.

It is also suggested that it was the Path worked by the "Brotherhood of Heliopolis", who were a collection of French alchemists who followed the infamous Fulcanelli.

It seems to be almost a matter of national pride that this Path is the one most preferred by French alchemists.

From the little I understand of this Path it revolves around the use of a very pure form of the semi-metal Antimony, and that the opening stages of this work involve a number of manipulations of Antimony designed to purify it, which leads to the production of an object called the "Star Regulus", a disk of pure Antimony that has a crystalline pattern on its upper surface that looks like a star. This path is so common that a number of pictures of this Antimony disk can be found on the internet.

I have seen a good number of discussions about this Path, which usually focus on the production of the regulus (disk), but rarely if ever talk about the middle or end stages of the work, which I believe few people have any idea about.

2: The Path of the Red Dragon.

This Path might be said to have a relative equal status of popularity along with the Regulus of Antimony, in Europe. In fact when I first started discussing the Acetate Path online in the late 90's, a lot of Europeans who were seriously involved in alchemy seemed to be completely unaware of the Acetate Path, and only had knowledge of the Regulus and the Red Dragon.

The Path of the Red Dragon is called this because it begins with the use of Cinnibar (Mercury Sulphide powder), which is a deep orange-red in colour. Almost everything I know about this Path comes from Rubellus Petrinus, who was involved with the French alchemist Roger Caro, who published a book on this Path which was commentary on a series of photos of the work, the last photo of which claimed to be a picture of the final red stage of the Great work. There were a number of claims that Caro succeeded in this Path, but a number of people who knew the man, or who studied in his esoteric Fraternity, insisted there was no success.

3: The Acetate Path (Path of Saturn, Path of the Vegetable Stone).

We know the practice of this Path reaches back to at least the beginning of the Christian era. Frater Albertus was the person who made knowledge of it popular, and it was picked up by Jean Dubuis who studied Albertus' alchemical work.

After the above three most well known Paths there are some paths which are also reasonably well known simply because literature which describes them is commonly circulated within the alchemical community ... although I believe not much is known about how to actually work these Paths (which is why they are not popular).

3: The Path of Dew-Niter

The basic concept around which this Path is centred is the idea that in dew there is a nitric salt, and that it is suggested this is the crude matter from which the Philosopher's Stone is made. The book which most promotes the idea of this Path is the "Mutus Liber" (the silent book), which is a series of engravings showing a man and woman collecting dew and processing it to produce the Stone. Also the ideas explained in "The Golden Chain of Homer" also promote the idea of a Path of this kind.

The basic theory of this Path is that nature has placed a niter Salt in atmospheric moisture, and that this salt possesses special properties that cause it to be a possible candidate for the Stone. Although this same salt can be found in various places in nature, hardcore individuals who follow this Path insist the salt must be harvested from dew only.

The famous book "Gold of a Thousand Mornings" described this idea at length.

4: The Path of Rain Water Niter (the universal Gur Path).

This Path is virtually identical to the previous one, with the difference that those who practice it insist that besides dew that special niter can also be harvested from rain water.

5: The Niter Salt Path

Again, the basics of this Path are similar to the previous two approaches, with the difference that those who follow this Path insist that it is acceptable to harvest the required niter from other sources (such as soil), as a dry salt. Adherents to this Path would go as far as insisting that the specific form of niter used can be also simply bought commercially.

Years ago I met a guy on an IRC network (chat network) who was a Belgian Freemason. He was in search of information on the niter-salt Path. He told me a story that he had one evening attended a Masonic meeting in a Belgian Lodge Room where a German Freemason, who was a Master Alchemist, was also present. He told me in confidence that later that evening, once most of the Brethren had gone home, and only a small dedicated group remained talking about esoteric subjects, that this German alchemist had performed a transmutation in the kitchenette, upon the stove surface, with a Stone he explained was made from salt of niter.

6: Kermes of Antimony

This Path is described by Fulcanelli, and is a Path which makes use of an extract from Antimony that is produced by dissolving Antimony with a strong alkali.

7: Liquid Mercury

There are probably a number of Paths which use liquid metallic Mercury as their basis, and this seems to be a favorite method of some Indian and most Chinese approaches to the Great Work. Frater Albertus wrote a book on one version of this Path (the title of which escapes me). In that book he describes that Path in detail from an old manuscript.

8: The Urine Path

The idea of this Path never seems to disappear. Today a number of people experiment with this approach. There are a

number of texts which describe it, most popular among which is a text by the famous Rosicrucian Bacstrom.

9: Human Blood

Along with the urine Path it is relatively commonly accepted that human blood is a possible candidate for the crude matter of the Stone. Bacstrom gives a detailed explanation of this Path, and some ideas relative to it are described in "An Alchemical Compendium".

10: Sea Salt Path

The Golden Chain of Homer talks a great deal about how niter is the mother salt of all minerals and metals, and presents the idea that sea salt is the first salt to evolve from atmospheric niter. So a number of methods for producing a Stone from sea salt can be found scattered among rarer alchemical books. Manly P Hall gives a full description of one of these recipes in his "Secret Teachings of all Ages".

11: Indian Alchemy

It is quite possible that among Unani Medicine, Ayurveda and other medicines in India there are several different methods for producing transmutation agents.

Samuel Norton describes a number of Paths in his 'Clavicula Alchemiae'. The main ones of which are:

12: The Path of Transparent Stone

13: The Path of The Mixed Stone

14: The Path of The Animal Stone

15: The Path of Vitriol

There are probably a number of Paths that call themselves the Vitriol Path. But the most well known are those Paths which use Roman Vitriol (vitriol of iron or copper) as the crude matter.

16: The Path of the Antimony Circulation

During the early 80's Frater Albertus performed a transmutation during a workshop tuition in Australia. All I know about the approach he used is that is used Antimony, and a large part of the preparation required extraction in a Soxhlet. He claimed he learned of the method in an old text, and a small group of the people present at the transmutation reproduced the process with varying success.

17: The Faraday Path

This can't really be called a path in the traditional sense that it was an established method used as part of a stream of teaching. So we might simply call it (at this stage) a method. Years ago I met a guy who was not an alchemist. He was an electro-chemist. But he had a private interest in alchemy, and had experimented extensively with processes described by the famous chemist 'Faraday'. Eventually this guy stumbled across a method, which he described to me in detail, of producing a transmutation agent via a method of electrolysis. He performed a number of transmutations, and also ingested an elixir made from this agent, which caused him to rejuvenate. I call his Path the Faraday Path (for want of any better description).

ESSAY FORTY

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (8) The Secret Solvents

It might be said that in seeking knowledge of the Philosopher's Stone

there are five primary secrets that are guarded. The true nature of:

1. The Proper Method
2. The Crude Matter
3. The Secret Fire
4. The Alkahest
5. Philosophic Mercury

The proper method I am discussing (in general terms) as I complete these essays.

The crude matter ... for this Path ... I have already described.

The last three secrets are probably the things about which virtually

nothing is known ... outside of a proper education and successful

experience. So let us now consider the real nature of the last three

secrets ... a subject which I refer to as "The Secret Solvents".

Previously we have separated each of the products of the destructive

distillation, and then PURIFIED them. Now we begin the THIRD WORK

which is the process of putting them all back together as a single

homogeneous whole.

This process leans on a knowledge of how to make a special solvent called 'Man's Blood' and a solvent called the 'Alkahest', which allow us to radically dissolve the mineral Salts which form the solvent and the body of our Stone. Without these solvents the Salts in the work cannot be opened, softened and made volatile enough for our Stone to penetrate the heart of every gross metal, and force their transmutation.

Previously we removed the volatile Sulphur from the Sulphurous mass (tar-like oil) by lifting it away with the help of the pure Ardent Water (Mercury-Acetone). This Ardent Water and volatile Sulphur now need to be united. This is achieved by distilling the Ardent water away from the Sulphur, and then returning it, to re-distill, until the Ardent Water lifts up with itself, over the still-head, all of the Sulphur, until nothing remains. This homogeneous combination of Ardent water and volatile Sulphur is our man's blood, and it has a special property ... it can dissolve and unite with Ripley's Earth, Albertus' Salt of Sulphur. The Secret Fire of the Philosophers.

This is the next step, to take the snow white pure Salt of Sulphur and dissolve it in the man's blood. This is done also by the very skilled

application of circulation (pelicansation).

The combination of the Ardent Water, the Volatile Sulphur and the fixt

Salt of Sulphur is that which the old alchemists called their Alkahest. It is the man's blood infused with the Secret Fire.

An acid

(the Sulphur) successfully combined with an alkali (the Salt), producing a solvent which is does not produce water+salt, but which

retains the solvent properties of both the acid, the alkali and the

spirit they are dissolved in. A oddity in nature and in chemistry.

The importance of the Alkahest, is its special property. Which is that

it has the ability to radically dissolve the 'basis', or foliated earth, our Nature Sulphur. (Which is in fact the pure crystalised Salt

of Lead. Also known as the Heart of Saturn).

This is the next step, to now use the Alkahest to dissolve and unite

with the foliated earth. Success in this step produces that which the

old Adepts called ... Philosophic Mercury. 'Philosophic' because it is

a solvent which is composed entirely of all the products that took

part in the destructive distillation ... and now no longer solid matter, but a liquid. In other words ... solid matter ... the Lead and

organic solvent, are now retrograded ... reverse engineered back to

their primordial state ... a viscous slime.

This substance is now the unification of all the products of the destructive distillation ... unified because if we now distill this Philosophic Mercury it will all come over the still-head, leaving no residue behind. In a manner this is our Stone in its most basic form, since it is the Four Elements united into a new Fifth State ... the Q-state. But this substance is not our universal transmutation agent. It lacks that which the old Adepts called 'The Ferment' (to gold or silver).

This is the subject of the next essay.

To recap:

Air + Fire = Man's Blood

Man's Blood + Earth = Alkahest

Alkahest + Nature Sulphur = Philosophic Mercury

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ESSAY FORTY-ONE

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (9) The Ferment of the Stone

In the previous essay I described how Ripley gives instruction on the preparation of the special solvents used in the Acetate Path. The summit of that stage of the work is the production of Philosophic Mercury.

The test to be sure that we actually have Mercurius Philosophorum is that if we place a pure sample of a metal in that solvent to digest, the Mercury will dissolve the metal, and reduce it to an oil, the special property of which is that this oil can not again be returned to its metallic state. The entire metal is consumed by this process. The old alchemists referred to this as 'radical dissolution'. That is, the metal is altered in its composition right to the core of its very nature.

Because of this property of Philosophic Mercury this substance, when discussed by the old alchemists, is described with the utmost reverence, and is recognised as the first substance in the unfolding stages of the Great work which possess truly alchemical properties, and because of this is 100 percent 'philosophic' in nature. That is, its action on metals (and other substances) is such that modern science has nothing like it, and its physics and chemistry cannot be explained by modern science (yet).

Among its other curious properties are its ability to convert glass into a soft liquid, and to dissolve precious gems in such a way that while liquid they can be poured into a mold and 'cast' into any shape desired, and then processed again into a solid gem. There is a famous story about the Count Saint Germaine, who was given a large diamond by the King of France, which had a flaw in it. Germaine took the diamond, made a mold from

it, dissolved it, cast it in the mold, re-solidified it, and returned it to the King ... now flawless. (See the authoritative work on Saint Germaine 'The Comte de St. Germain: Isabel Cooper-Oakley).

There is a legend that at one time there was not a royal crown in Europe that did not contain precious gems that either were produced artificially from scratch by alchemists, or were composed of many lesser stones dissolved and combined to form larger single stones.

Very little is said about these aspects of advanced alchemy in writing, but there are comments scattered here and there among the 1000s of volumes written about alchemy.

The importance of Philosophic Mercury in the Great Work is that once the 'basis' for the Stone is complete (the three Principals are recombined into a homogeneous whole), the Stone cannot transmute until it has its 'Ferment' ... which is an oil of either Silver or Gold produced by the radical dissolution of these metals in Philosophic Mercury.

A Stone at the white stage of perfection imbibed with the Ferment of Silver will transmute base metals into precious white metals (such as silver, platinum and uranium). A Stone calcined to the red stage of perfection imbibed with the Ferment of Gold will then transmute base metals in to Gold.

The Ferment of Gold, or philosophic oil of Gold, is the 'true' potable gold of the alchemists. The old Adepts tell us that its potency alone is almost equal to that of the Elixir Vitae. This Ferment (of either Silver or Gold) is also a strictly Philosophic substance, since by its very presence in the process of transmutation it has the ability to force other metals to become Gold or Silver. From the point of view of modern Physics such a reaction is completely unthinkable. There is no theory in modern science that could even begin to explain such a reaction.

But ... before the basis of the Stone can be imbibed with its Ferment to Gold or Silver, that basis must first be prepared, itself. Which is the subject of my next essay.

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ESSAY FORTY-TWO

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (10) To Purify the Earth

Ripley begins to discuss the creation of the vehicle for the Stone in the fourth chapter of his Bosome Book "The Creation of our Basis". This chapter describes the preparation of the solid matter as the vehicle of the Stone, and Ripley instructs us, thus:

"Then take out all the Feces which remaineth in the Retort, and are blackish like unto Soot, which Feces are called our Dragon, of which feces Calcyne one pound or more at your pleasure in a fervent hot Fire in a Potters or Glass-makers Furnace, or in a Furnace of vente (or a Wind Furnace) until it become a white Calx, as white as Snow, which white Calx keep well, and clean by it self, for it is called the Basis and Foundation of the Work, and it is now called Mars, and our white fixed Earth or ferrum Philosophorum."

This is a very typical description of the Preparation of the primary Salt, explained virtually the same way by every alchemical author who describes the Acetate Path. The concept looks simple enough. Take a portion of the soot-like residue that remains behind after the destructive distillation and calcine it in the hottest furnace you can get access to, which in Ripley's time would have been a pottery or glass makers furnace (1000 degrees C+). Which process he basically concludes by saying ... "until it become a white calx, as white as snow".

If you have ever attempted this type of calcination you will immediately recognise that something Ripley is making look simple, is actually a serious task. Because not only does it require a huge amount of energy, and a constant heat for

weeks at a time, at the end it is not 'white as snow'. No matter how you look at it.

So either Ripley is exaggerating the 'white as snow', or he is not telling us everything. From my experience following Ripley's method from the Bosome Book I can say that I have not so far found one lie. But in a number of places while he does tell the truth, he doesn't tell it all. The truth is this Salt does need to end up white as snow, because we require it to be perfectly pure. So there is some knack here that Ripley is not describing.

When I first started work on this stage of the process 20 years ago I simply could not find a solution to that which I eventually called 'the Salt enigma'. I tried a number of different approaches, based on tiny extra bits of information other authors provided. It quickly became obvious to me that anyone who had come this far in the past knew that this calcination of the Salt was very tricky, and so they always described it in a way that caused it to be a serious hurdle. If the alchemist did not have a lot of skill behind him, concerning how to treat Salts in order to purify them, or access to instruction that provided a solution, then he would never succeed in reaching the summit of the work. Because at the point of cohobation of the Principals, if the Salt was not completely pure, the three Principals would never unite into One homogeneous state, forming the vehicle for the Stone.

A number of times I learned this the hard way, wasting years of hard work, and in the end always realising that the reason my Principals would not unite was due to the Salt enigma, that the Salt was not open and pure enough ... until, that was I eventually found a key to opening the Salt and to cleansing it all of impurities.

Only one anonymous Adept ever described a real workable answer to this enigma, a solution which until he described it in

writing must have remained a carefully guarded secret for centuries.

Ripley does us a service and explains that when this Salt is pure and open the old Adepts referred to it as 'our Mars' and Ferrum Philosophorum (Philosophic Iron). The reason for this is that iron was known as the hardest of metals, and this Salt is the hardest (most closed and stubborn) of the substances we manipulate in the Great Work. Therefore it rightly forms a suitable vehicle, container or shell for the Stone, analogically similar to the armour of a Knight. Which tells us something about the Knight standing on the fountain in the Splendor Solis series.

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ESSAY FORTY-THREE

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (11) Putrification and the White Stone

Thus far we have recombined the acetone soluble Sulphur with the acetone to produce the Alkahest. Then we have used this Alkahest to dissolve the fixt Salt of Sulphur, which Ripley calls the Element of Earth, to produce Philosophic Mercury. This now leaves us with the last two products of the original destructive distillation to integrate into our Stone ... the Salt called 'Mars' and the water soluble portion of the Sulphur, which Ripley calls the Element of Fire.

The next step Ripley describes in the 17th Chapter of the Bosome Book, which he titles 'The Work of Putrifaction', and I quote:

"When all your Elements be thus separated, then take the white Calcined Feces first of all reserved, called Mars, and put so much thereof into a Chymia as will scarcely fill half the Glass, and thereupon pour so much of our Ardent Water rectified as may but well cover the Calx which done incontinent stop close the Glass with a Blind-head, and set it into a cold place, until the Calx have drank up all the Liquor, which it will do in 8 days, then imbibe it again with the like quantity of the same Water and let it stand eight days more, and so Reiterate the work, from 8 days to 8 days, until the same Calx will drink no more; but stand Liquid still, then Seal up the Glass with a Hermes seal and set it in Balneo Mariae in a temperate heat to Putrifaction."

Ripley begins here by taking the pure Salt (Mars) I spoke of previously and places it into a chymia (small long-necked flask) with some of the pure acetone (ardent water). The flask is sealed air-tight and its contents left to macerate in the cold. We

are told that in eight days the Salt will absorb all of the ardent water. We are instructed to keep adding more ardent water until after a series of eight-day periods of imbibing the Salt is now saturated with the acetone, and cannot take any more.

Next we are instructed to take this saturated Salt and digest it in Balneo (in a water bath) at about 30 degrees Celsius (the heat of putrefaction). In the 18th Chapter ("The Digestion of the White Stone") Ripley explains the next part of this stage:

"Then in that temperate Balneo let your Glass stand unremoved by the space of fully 150 days, and until the Stone within the Glass become first Russet, and after whitish green, and after that very white like unto the Eyes of Fishes, which then is Sulphur of Nature flowing, and not evaporating in Fire, and our white Stone ready to be firmented."

This putrefaction must be continued 150 days (almost six months). During this time the snow white Martian Salt begins to turn russet brown. (See attached pictures). The attached pictures were taken in 2002, when digital photography was still in its infancy, so the quality is poor. But they show relatively clearly the evolution of the russet stage of the putrefaction of the White Stone. Toward the end of the russet stage the mass turns white-green (just as Ripley describes). In the bottom right of the attached pictures you can see what happens if the heat is raised too high during that stage. The result is a vitrified green mass. The 'Stone', but stopped in its tracks at an immature part of its progress.

Ripley does us another service by pointing out that the final point in this White stage the matter is referred to as 'Sulphur of Nature' ... another important concept nailed down. He also tells us that this mass is now so soft and volatile that under heat it 'flows' (not unlike wax) our 'Sal-Fluere' ;) ... which explains why when I made the mistake eleven years ago (at my first serious attempt at this work) of raising the heat just a degree too far,

the mass flowed and vitrified at the wrong point. Its not hard to imagine, if I had managed the heat more carefully, and the Nature Sulphur had evolved to its final 'white', what you would be seeing there in that picture would not be a green 'Stone' but a Red one.

Now we have our 'White Stone' (the alchemical Queen), ready to be imprinted (receive its ferment) either to the White or the Red, in order to transmute base metals either to noble white metals, or to gold, respectively.

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ESSAY FORTY-FOUR

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (12) Ferment to the Red Stone

Once we have produced the vehicle for the Stone, the next step is to ripen that white vehicle, and then imbibe it with its Ferment. Ripley continues at this point describing how to use the vehicle for the Stone to make the White Transmuting Stone, by addition of oil of Silver as the 'white' ferment. I'm not going to comment on that part of the process because it is essentially the same as the process for making the Red Transmuting Stone ... which is the summit of the Work. So I am going to progress from here right on to that final process, the Red Transmuting Stone.

The next stage in the work is described in Ripley's 20th Chapter, which he titles: "The Digestion of the Red Stone".

Where he explains ...

"Then take out the white Stone and divide it in to two, and know the true weight of each half, the one half reserve to the white work, the other half put into the Glass, and seal it up again with Hermes Seal, and then remove the Glass into a Cinerition which is somewhat a hotter Fire, and let it stand there likewise unremoved in that digestion, until it become Red, and of a Purple Colour, so have you the red Stone also ready to be fermented."

The 'white stone' he speaks of is our aforementioned vehicle of the Stone. He divides it in two, and takes one half to continue to the red work. He heats it in an ash bath (cinerition), until that white vehicle changes colour to red.

In Christio-chemical symbolism this stage is referred to as 'the Pelican in her piety'. The standard icon of this symbol is a white Pelican (the white vehicle) pecking its own breast and shedding its blood to feed its young. This provides a graphic picture of what happens at this point, where the white stone 'bleeds' and a red oil drips out, eventually turning the entire mass completely red.

In the 24th Chapter titled "The Preparation of the Red-ferment" Ripley continues ...

"Then likewise take Gold very purely, first purged from all other Metals that may be joyned with it, with ten parts of Antimony, and then dissolve it in our Mercury or Liquor Solutive, as before you did the Lune, and when it is perfectly dissolved the Liquor will be Citrine; then in like manner, rectifie from it again our Mercury or Liquor Solutive, and then Seal up the Oyl of Gold Ferment in a Chemia fit for it, and set it in Balneo to Putrefie, which likewise will become black, and must stand still unremoved in digestion, until it become white, which then remove into a stronger Fire without opening the Glass, and then keep it until it change Colours and become Citrine, which then is also Ferment of Ferments for the Red-work."

Next we take 24 carat gold. Ripley describes an old method of purifying gold where it is fluxed with Antimony (known as cupellation), and the Antimony clings to the impurities and they together form a crust on the top of the molten gold, that can then be removed.

This pure gold is then dissolved in our Philosophic Mercury. He explains that when the gold is completely dissolved by our Mercury that solvent will be tintured citrine (yellowish). Then the Philosophic Mercury is carefully distilled away from the dissolved gold (which he now calls oil of gold). This is an alchemical oil of the 3rd Order, because it is produced by the radical dissolution of gold in Philosophic Mercury.

This oil is then closed in a chymia (a small bowl - long necked flask). This flask is then suspended in a water bath, to warm the oil (ferment of gold) to 30 degrees celsius (the heat of putrefaction). This oil then turns black (which is a sign of its putrefaction). It must stay in putrefaction until it reaches a white colour, which then place on a hotter fire until the citrine colour is reached again ... and we know from both theory and practice that 3rd Order oils undergoing putrefaction change through various colours, which the old alchemists called both 'the rainbow' and 'the peacock's tail'. Ripley only hints at this concept, above.

Once the oil is now citrine again it is known as the 'ferment of ferments' ... in other words, the most powerful of all transmuting agents.

Finally Ripley tells us what to do with this Ferment in his 25th Chapter ... "The Fermentation of the Red-stone"

"Then to the other half of the Stone before rubified, digested, and reserved for the Red-work, put so much of the foresaid Gold Ferment as may contain the 4th part of the said Stone, and then fix them as you did the white-Stone, under Fire in a fixatory Vessel which will be then very well done in two or three days."

The reddened (rubified) vehicle of the Stone is now imbibed with this Ferment equal in volume to a quarter the size of the reddened Stone. Then together this reddened stone and its Ferment are digested until the two become one. That is, until once you heat the Stone the Ferment nor any other substance separates from it ... because they are all 'fixt', that is, solidified, together.

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ESSAY FORTY-FIVE

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (13) Inceration for the Red

So let us continue with our consideration of Ripley's acetate work.

The next step in the process is that which Ripley calls 'inceration'. Inceration means 'to make wax-like'. Therefore the title of the 26th Chapter of the Bosome Book means ... to make the red stone of a wax-like consistency.

Chapter 26 begins by instructing us:

"When they are thus fixed together, and thereby become one very fine Powder, incerate, that is imbibe it with the Red Oyl of our Stone, then congeal it again, and again imbibe, and congeal and iterate this work so often until it will flow in Fire as Wax..."

From this we learn that the red stone we previously made is reduced to powder. Inceration is achieved by imbibing the red stone with the oil that had been lifted off the unpurified oil as it arrived from the destructive distillation. In other words, the water soluble portion of the oil. Therefore, it is the nature of this oil which possesses the ability to soften the structure of the red stone.

Next we are instructed:

"... but not evaporate when it is put upon a Plate of Copper Fiery hot ..."

One of the properties of this now wax-like substance is that when it is placed on a copper plate and heated, it melts, but

does not smoke or evaporate. In other words, it is completely 'fixt'.

Next:

" ...which then congeal up until it be clear transparent hard, red in Colour like a Ruby or Jacinth, which is then the Medicine of the third Degree, and the perfect Red Stone, transmuting all Bodies, and especially Mercury, Lead and Silver into pure Gold, as any of the Natural Mine."

This wax-like substance is then cooled, whereby it becomes thick and then solid. Now it is a transmutation agent, capable of transmuting lesser metals in to more noble.

Ripley completes this chapter by cautioning us that this Stone is hygroscopic (attracts moisture from the air), so will dissolve is you leave it exposed to moist air.

"These Stones must be kept by themselves in several Glasses, or fair Boxes in a warm place, or dry at the least, as you would keep Sugar, because they are of so tender and Oyly Substance, as they are apt to dissolve in every moist place which therefore preserve as is here shewed."

One the Stone is brought to this stage the next step is 'Multiplication', increasing the transmutative power of the Stone.

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ESSAY FORTY-SIX

Basic Theory of the Acetate Path (14) Multiplication and Projection

Here are my final words on the basic theory of the acetate path, rounding off the full description of the work.

Two steps in the process remain to be described. Multiplication, and projection. I should point out that these two steps are the part of the process I know least about. So my description here is only theory, and will be short.

Multiplication refers to the technique of manipulating the finished Stone in such a way as to increase its ability to transmute. That is, to increase its potency as a transmutation agent. This is important because after spending maybe years of time to confect your Stone, it would kind of be self defeating to use it up in a couple of experiments with transmutation and use it all up, then have to start over.

A broad research of classic alchemical documents that provide descriptions of the technique for multiplying the potency of the Stone will show that ideas about how this is to be achieved vary greatly. Whether or not there are various methods that work, or only one viable technique, it is very difficult to tell. For the most part the truth of the matter can probably only be discovered by trial and error ... a difficult situation when it is likely that the experimenter will begin with only a small amount of the Stone as a means of solving the problem.

Ripley's take on this process is described in the 27th Chapter of the Bosome Book, Titled ...

"The Multiplication or Increase of the Vertue and Goodness of the aforesaid White and Red Stones"

And I quote:

"If you wish to exalt your Medicine or Stone in quantity or goodness, then put your aforesaid white or red Stone, or part of each into a several Vyol of Glass fit for the quantity, close well the Viol, then hang up your Glass or Glasses in Balneo Mariae vaporoso so that it touch not the Water, in this warm fume or breath, the Stone which was congealed before in the Glass will now be dissolved, which then congeal again upon warm Ashes, and again thus dissolve and congeal, and so iterate this work of dissolution and congelation until at last the Stone within the Glass dissolved will be congealed, as soon as he cometh out of the Pot or Balneo, and feeleth the cold Air, without any other manner of Congelation to be used, and note that how often in this work you do dissolve and congeal your said Medicine or Stone, so many times doth he increase his Vertue ten times in projection, so that if at the first one ounce will convert 100 ounces, after the second Solution, the same one shall convert 1000, after the third 10000, after the fourth time 100000, and after the fifth 1000000 parts of any imperfect Metal into pure and true Gold and Silver in all Examinations as any of the Natural Mine."

A small portion of the finished Stone is placed in a small flask with a long neck. The flask is sealed tight and then suspended over a water bath so that it does not touch the water, but only coming into contact with the steam from the water. The heat from the steam, which will be less than 100 degrees C, will melt the fragment of the Stone. When it is dissolved the flask should be moved from the steam and sat on an ash bath, and that degree of heat will affect the Stone in such a way that it will re-congeal and slowly harden again.

Ripley instructs us that each melting and re-congealing will increase the transmuting power of the Stone ten times.

This method of multiplication, if it actually works, is one of the simplest techniques I have come across. Many methods described by other authors also seek to increase the physical size of the stone while at the same time increasing its potency to transmute.

Finally, the subject of Projection.

Projection is not simply the act of tossing a piece of the Stone into a crucible of molten metal and thereby forcing it to be transmuted into gold or silver. Ripley explains his method, in the 28th Chapter, something like this: a portion of metallic Mercury (Hg) is heated in a crucible and a piece of the Stone is projected into that hot Mercury. This Mercury is thus changed into a new form of the Stone, itself, and it congeals from the liquid metal into a solid. A portion of this substance is then taken and projected on a new batch of heated liquid Mercury ... and so on four times. With the fourth cycle the fourth fresh batch of Mercury will transmute into gold (or silver, depending on whether you were using the white or red Stone).

This is a kind of interesting method, and quite novel, compared to what most other authors suggest. One of the things Ripley doesn't say is that in the first projection, of the Stone onto the hot Mercury, the Stone must be wrapped in wax, otherwise as it hits the surface of the hot Mercury it will evaporate, and no transmutation will occur.

So that about wraps it up. While this is my last word on this specific thread of conversation, I will add detail to pieces of what I've already said, in future, and of course answer questions on this subject from anyone who would like to know more.

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ESSAY FORTY-SEVEN

Qabala - Some background (1)

Of all things esoteric, if alchemists of past ages studied anything it would have been qabala. As the famous father of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, MacGregor Mathers, once said, when we look at the core teachings of the qabala we cannot help but recognise that significant parts of its doctrine have a lot in common with alchemy.

Much that is missing from historic alchemical literature in the way of descriptions of essential hermetic philosophy can be found embedded under centuries of the political and religious garbage that has clung to qabala. For this reason, almost alone, it is worth serious study.

When most western occultists come to the study of qabala there are two things about it that they more often than not consider defining characteristics of that discipline. First, that qabala hales from the Hebrew esoteric tradition, and secondly, that qabala is primarily part of the magical tradition. But in fact both of these things are part of the later development of qabala.

Traditionally and historically we know that the Hebrews did not invent or discover the core teachings of qabala themselves. Most immediately the source of the qabala is attributed to the esoteric teachings of both ancient Babylon and ancient Egypt. The Hebrews adopted the esoteric teachings of these two cultures when they were, as a nation, bound in captivity in those two countries at various times in their history.

In the traditional teachings of Hebrew qabala the main sources of qabalistic teaching are said to have been Abraham and Moses. Abraham was a Chaldee, and Moses we know was raised as a member of the Egyptian royal family. We also know,

from history, that it was standard practice for members of the Egyptian royal family to be trained initiates of the Egyptian mystery tradition, and to hold high ranks in the Priesthood. So it is highly likely that if such a person as Moses existed, and had an early influence on the formation of the Hebrew system of qabala, that in doing so he would have been hugely influenced by the Egyptian esoteric tradition.

In this way it might be suggested that the 'original' qabala was in fact Egyptian Hermetism.

We also know, on the basis of history and of qabalistic tradition, that the earliest form of Hebrew qabala revolved around a system of meditation referred to as Merkabah (chariot) mysticism. In this way the earliest qabalists were preoccupied with the attainment of Spiritual Illumination, not with magic.

On this basis we might say with relative certainty that the original qabala ... the proto-system from which the doctrine and practices of Hebrew qabala came from ... was neither Hebrew nor was it a magical tradition, in the way we understand qabalistic magic today. Exactly what the proto-qabala might have looked like, from which the earliest Hebrew qabalists took their teachings, it is very hard to say. But if we study the Hebrew qabala carefully, today, and work at stripping away from it the politics, religion and overt magic that plays such a huge role in traditional Hebrew qabalism, we can manage to root out the core teachings embodied in qabala, and at the same time recognise why qabala and alchemy have so much in common.

In this way we can obtain a glimpse of what the original Hermetic qabala might have been like, before it became tightly entangled with Judaism.

When studying qabala today there are roughly two primary systems that western occultists make use of. One is orthodox

qabala, which might be described as qabala that was developed by Hebrew Rabbis and evolved alongside Judaism. The other is what we call today either the Anglo-qabala or the Hermetic qabala, which has evolved out of orthodox qabala and was largely developed by non-Jewish western occultists, many of whom were originally Christians. For this reason the earliest phase of the development of the Anglo-qabala is often referred to as the Christian qabala.

But at a much later period, and up until our time, qabala has evolved in to a much less religious and much more secular discipline, which I feel more rightly deserves the title 'Hermetic Qabala'. This later phase of the evolution of qabala can most readily be seen in the form of qabalism taught within the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

Gershom Scholem, a famous modern authority on orthodox qabala, has been quoted as stating that he believes the qabalistic teaching of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn is the most accurate and useful system of western qabala.

On this basis most of the comment I am going to make on the subject of qabala will be based on the Golden Dawn qabalistic system. For anyone who is not entirely familiar with the Golden Dawn qabala I have provided a bibliography at the end of this essay.

When western occultists look to source works from which they derive the concepts upon which western Hermetic qabalistic teaching is based, there are four primary texts.

- (1) The Sepher HaZohar
- (2) The Sepher Yetzirah
- (3) The Bahir Illumination
- (4) The Torah and the New Testament

The least interesting and least well known of these in the western tradition is the Bahir, or book of Illumination. So I'm not going to comment on that work.

The Sepher Yetzirah (or Book of Formation) is probably of most interest to occultists of the magical tradition. Mainly because the Yetzirah describes the key concepts from which the magical qabala has its source.

The Torah and New Testament (in fact the entire Bible) is of interest in that, as any serious qabalist knows, the texts which make up both the Old and New Testaments were totally written by very learned qabalists.

As far as I am concerned the source work of most interest to anyone attempting to get to the root of the proto-qabala is the Sepher HaZohar, the Book of Splendor. The Zohar is said to be a collection of orthodox secret and mainly oral qabalistic teachings and traditions gathered together and published probably for the first time by a Jewish writer named Moses de Leon in 13th century Spain. De Leon ascribed the work to Shimon bar Yochai ("Rashbi"), a rabbi of the 2nd century during the Roman persecution. The original collection of texts that goes under the name Sepher HaZohar is a huge work. The edition I most admire, the Soncino Press publication, is five volumes, and even though it is an abridged version of the original Zohar, still runs to some 2500 pages.

Academics love to insist, for the most part, that the original texts of the Zohar were fabricated by Moses de Leon, and do not represent a real qabalistic source work. But that is of course the opinion of people who have nothing more than an intellectual interest in the Zohar, and who have no practical experience of qabala.

For the most part the core texts which make up the Zohar are a kind of esoteric or mystic commentary on the Torah. It is

set out like a dialogue, where a Rabbi is describing the secret and qabalistic meaning behind the Mosaic texts of the Old Testament (The Pentateuch). It is largely from these commentaries that qabalists in general, and western Hermetists specifically, have plucked out the core concepts which we have come to know today as the key teachings of qabala.

While qabalistic concepts form a large part of the alchemical theory I teach, I rarely make specific reference to qabala itself, when presenting these ideas. So, in this way, most of my students have rarely seen me discuss qabalism specifically, since I prefer to divorce the qabalistic concepts I teach (largely) from the culture of modern and orthodox qabalism itself. This is because I believe that the ideas presented traditionally in the qabalistic setting are long overdue presentation entirely on their own merit, outside of the clique of the religio-political humdrum of Judaism. In this way much of what I am about to explain on the subject of qabala, in the coming essays, is a form of presentation most of my students have never seen in relation to that which they have learned from me concerning alchemy. So, in a manner, the following commentary is my first attempt at putting my thoughts on qabala into writing in an orderly format.

In the coming essays, then, let us look at how qabala is related to alchemy, and what qabala can teach us about alchemy.

Some helpful texts:

Secret Wisdom of the Kabbalah by JFC Fuller
A Garden of Pomegranates by Israel Regardie
The Mystical Kabbalah by A.E.Waite
Qabala Unveiled by MacGregor Mathers
The Zohar - the Soncino Press edition
Sepher Yetzirah by Aryeh Kaplan

ESSAY FORTY-EIGHT

Qabala - Background - The Tree of Life (2)

Continuing with my description of the basics of qabala, for those here who may not have been exposed to it before, we'll now look at the central concept of the qabalistic system, called 'The Tree of Life'.

The entire scheme of the qabala revolves around a diagram which qabalists refer to as 'The Tree of Life'. (See attached diagram). This diagram is the primary tool used in teaching the ideas associated with qabala, and is a type of mnemonic device, devised in an age when qabala was very likely entirely a secret oral teaching. The label 'Tree of Life' refers back to a section of Genesis, in the Old Testament, where we are told that there were two sacred trees in the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Knowledge (of good and evil) and the Tree of Life. The Tree of Knowledge is a metaphor for physical life (incarnation), and the Tree of Life is a metaphor for hermetic initiation ... that is, training that leads to attainment of Spiritual Illumination. Qabala is considered to be a system of knowledge used in the process of initiatory training.

In this way, before anything else, the plan displayed through the tree of life diagram is the plan of an initiatory programme. That is, before anything else, the old qabalists used this diagram to discuss and pass on knowledge of the structure and technique of their initiatory training. No matter what else qabala might be, or have evolved in to, before anything else it was concerned with teaching initiates how to attain Spiritual Illumination.

Secondly, the Tree of Life system describes the nature and structure of reality. How reality came into existence, how it evolves and in what direction it is moving. This is important due

to the fact that initiation, being a process derived from natural law, is therefore part of the nature of the evolution of reality.

In describing the detailed structure of this diagram I am going to refrain from using the Hebrew names for its various parts (except where an adequate English equivalent does not exist), since to do so would be unnecessary, and only help to complicate things.

This diagram is composed of eleven spheres, one of which, before initiation comes in to effect, exists only in potential. So qabala is a view of reality that is based on a decimal system. that is, that qabalists believe the core and essential pieces of reality are ten in number. Since mathematics is considered by the ancient philosophers to be the basis of the structure of reality, these spheres are labelled, before anything else, with the numbers 1 to 10, and the numeral 11 is given to the potential sphere. The decimal structure of the Tree is important, because when contemplating the origin of qabala, academics base their calculations on what they know historically about philosophic systems that are based on decimal structure. The oldest of such systems that academics know of is (generally) found in ancient Greek philosophy.

These 10 spheres are then arranged in a specific pattern, and are linked together by 22 lines, or 'paths'. Historically, while there has never been any argument (as far as I am aware) as to how the spheres are arranged, there are nevertheless a number of systems of linking the spheres with these paths. There are almost always 22 paths, though, because as the spheres are labelled (foremostly) with the numbers 1 to 10, the paths are labelled with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Due to the lack of provable accuracy in defining path-structure to the spheres, in the historic ancient qabala, I teach that the paths are the least important aspect of the Tree of Life system (for alchemical purposes). Of prime importance are the

spheres, and the pattern of their arrangement in relation to one another. Individuals who consider themselves serious qabalists today would probably reel in shock at that statement, but we should not lose sight of the fact that, here, I am teaching alchemy, not qabala, and so my concern with qabala is with what it can teach us about alchemy, not Hebrew mystical or magical philosophy.

Next, the spheres are arranged in to four main groups, which I have labelled with the Roman letters a, b, c and d. These are known as the Four Worlds. Historically there are also a couple of versions of how this is carried out, but I will only talk here about the version I teach in relation to alchemy. In section (world) 'a' there are three spheres, and these are referred to as 'the supernal triad' (the three highest spheres). The traditional Anglo-label for these three spheres is 'The Realm of Archetypes' (that is, the level where the blueprint of reality resides). In section 'b' there are three spheres referred to as 'The Realm of the Intellect'. That is, the region where the rational mind operates. In section 'c' we find the three spheres referred to as 'The Realm of the Foundation (or Formation) of Matter'. This is where the sub-strata of physical reality exists. In modern terms it is the unconscious mind. In section 'd' we find only one sphere, and it is known as 'The Kingdom' (or the physical universe).

These four worlds, or realms, are also given the attributes of the four alchemical Elements. To the archetypal realm, Fire. To the intellectual realm, Air. To the formative or foundation realm, Water. To the kingdom, Earth. This is another reason why academics believe that it is possible that qabala is ultimately Greek in source, because they believe that the concept of four Elements was a Greek invention. (Something which is highly unlikely).

The supernal triad is divided from the rest of the Tree by a demarcation referred to as 'The Abyss' (shown in the diagram

as a red dashed line). Everything above this line is non-physical, and eternal. Everything below this line is physical and temporal. I refer to the supernal triad as the higher functions, and everything below the abyss as the lower functions.

Between the lowest sphere (10) and the realm of formation is another demarcation line, called 'The Veil'. The Veil divides the visible and concrete aspect of physical reality from the invisible side of physical reality.

Above the first sphere (1) are what is referred to as the 'three veils of negative existence', representing conditions of reality out of which the physical universe is created.

Traditionally qabalists like to imbue the 10 spheres of the Tree with a large number of other attributes. Besides the numbers which label them each sphere also is given astrological labels, divine and angelic hierarchical labels, colour attributes and so-forth. Each path also has various attributes besides the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the most famous of which are that the major arcana cards of the tarot each of which have a path attributed to them.

It should also be noted that the order with which numbers are given to the spheres, in relation to the tree's structure, forms a zig-zag pattern from the top down which is called the lightning path.

The three spheres on the right side of the tree are known as the pillar of severity. The four spheres down the middle are known as the pillar of equilibrium. The three spheres down the left side are known as the pillar of mercy.

The 11th sphere, which exists only as a potential condition, is known as 'knowledge', and when this condition is actuated, it forms a bridge across the abyss between the lower functions and the higher functions.

The description of the Tree of Life I've given here is the most basic outline that is required to understand the concepts that I will be discussing in the coming essays on qabala. The conventional scheme of the Tree as studied by qabalists is vastly more complicated than the view I have given here, but as I have pointed out previously, our interest is only in those aspects of qabala which are directly related to alchemy ... and then primarily inner alchemy.

ESSAY FORTY-NINE

Qabala - The Partzufim 1 (3)

Once we know how the Tree of Life is structured, the next thing we need to grasp, in order to understand how qabala overlaps with lab alchemy, is to consider the subject of that which qabalists call the ... partzufim. The qabalistic word partzufim (there are various spellings) might be translated in to contemporary English as ... primary intelligences. Or primary psychological archetypes (re: Jungian psychology). In other words, the partzufim are to the mind what the primary organs are to the physical body. As each physical organ in your body has its own particular shape, and performs a specific function in the overall system of your body, so the partzufim have their own form and function in the mind, together contributing to the overall working of the human psyche.

The first word in the book of Genesis is the Hebrew word Berashith (B-R-A-Sh-I-Th), which means 'In The Beginning'. There is a complex qabalistic teaching concerning the esoteric meaning of this word, but I am only going to touch on one aspect of that teaching, momentarily, because it will only probably be of use to individuals who have studied qabala in depth. But this idea will help set the stage for what follows.

The word Berashith is composed of six Hebrew letters, Latinised that looks like this: B-R-A-Sh-I-Th. If we split this word in two (into a binary) we obtain two words ... Bera Shith (BRA ShITh), which translates as "He created the six." This little code is said to mean that when the Supreme Being created the human universe, He created it with six facets. Two of ideas about these facets are important to this essay. First, that physical space is divided in to six directions: up-down, back-front and left-right. This concept is the very root of physical existence - the structure of physical space. In the mind a similar

situation exists. Just as physical space has six facets, the mind has six partzufim - intelligences.

In this way ... physics and psychology (mind and matter), lab alchemy and inner alchemy, at their root, are linked by a common structure.

There are various orthodox schools of thought about the partzufim. But I am not going to discuss them here. That would require a long winded description on its own. In Hermetic qabala (Anglo-qabala), very little is taught or understood about the partzufim, mainly because Western Tradition pop-occultism does not overly concern itself with the 'psychology' of magic or alchemy. So few modern occultists in the West have any real idea about what these six partzufim are, or how they are made use of.

The system of partzufim I teach is not orthodox. It is a system I was taught by the individual who trained me in inner alchemy, and I have every reason to believe this novel view is very old. I teach and use this unique view of the partzufim because it works ... that is, it functions effectively as an initiatory tool, and when we investigate the mind properly (hermetic-scientifically), we discover that in fact this is how the mind is structured.

If you look at the attached diagram you will see the Tree of Life with the partzufim marked on certain spheres of the Tree.

Starting at the top of the diagram we have:

- (1) The Higher Genius (Hebrew Yechidah)
- (2) The Higher Will (Hebrew Chiah)
- (3) The Desire for Unity (Hebrew Neschamah)

These three partzufim make up the supernal triad of intelligences. They only exist as potential psychological

functions in the average human (non-initiate), and are immortal. That is, they do not die-off between incarnations.

- (4) The Thinking Mind (Hebrew Ruach)
- (5) The Unconscious Mind (Hebrew Nephesch)
- (6) The Binary Sustainer (Hebrew Nachash)

These three intelligences form the lower or temporal triad. They are the very foundation of the incarnate human psyche in the average human, and are temporal (temporary psychological functions). That is, they are created at the start of each new life, and die-off at the end of each life.

I sometimes refer to the supernal intelligences as the horizontal triad, and the temporal intelligences as the verticle triad. When things exist on the horizontal they have a 'level' relationship (to use a masonic concept). When things exist on a verticle axis the relationship is hierachial. That is, one thing is more than another, and an imbalance exists between the parts.

In orthodox qabala the four spheres which I have grayed-out in my diagram are traditionally referred to as aspects of the ruach (thinking mind). But I am not going to elaborate on that idea because it unnecessarily complicates things.

Sphere 1 is a neuter (a-sexual)
Sphere 2 is masculine
Sphere 3 is feminine

Sphere 6 is binary (bi-sexual)
Sphere 5 is feminine
Sphere 4 is masculine

The spheres in the supernal triad are 'adult' (mature aspects of mind)

The Spheres in the temporal triad are 'adolescent' (immature).

When the lower spheres evolve (through initiation) they develop in to the higher spheres.

So why bother learning all this? Why bother studying the psychoogical side of qabala?

To answer that question you need to reconsider ideas I presented in the early essays. First, that every living system is composed of three Principal conditions ...

- (1) Energy (fuel-Sulphur)
- (2) Information (intelligence-Mercury)
- (3) Structure (form-Salt)

Modern science investigates the energy-structure side of reality, but has virtually no real idea about the intelligent side. Because most modern Western occultists are heavily indoctrinated into the scientific paradigm during civil education, when an individual comes to study alchemy, without really recognising it they bring that bias point of view with them. So they look at alchemy as a process of manipulating physical substances, and muse about the role of energy in alchemical processes. But how many students of alchemy have the slightest idea about how to study and make use of the 'intelligence' aspect of alchemy? Virtually none. In modern alchemy, and largely in traditional (historic) alchemy, there is no 'intellect' teaching. At the least, not openly.

So it is important to understand that a lack of knowledge about the role intellect plays in alchemy, places the student in a position where his approach to alchemy is not much more than a modern chemist's approach. No matter how much he loves to wax lyrical about esoteric or mystical ideas. When that kind of student enters his lab, in practical terms he is only dealing effectively with the energy and structure aspects of alchemy.

If we understand this much, then its not hard to see that to BE an alchemist, we must know as much about 'mind' as we do about substance and energy. This is where qabala copmes in to its own, because 'essentially' qabala is a form of esoteric-alchemic psychology.

In the next essay I will elaborate on the nature of each of the six primary partzufim.

ESSAY FIFTY

Qabala - The Partzufim 2

The Higher Genius

Let us start to look, in detail, at the nature of the six partzufim. I will begin from the top of the scheme and work my way down, discussing each intelligence alone or on pairs, over the next few essays. (Refer to the diagram from the last essay).

The intelligence which populates the first sphere of the Tree of Life is called by qabalists the 'Yechidah'. Which term translates as 'the unified intelligence'. I prefer the term 'higher genius' because it is more secular and has a more hermetic feel to it, as well as emphasizing the 'intelligent' aspect of that which we are considering.

This intelligence exists outside of physical reality as we know it. A major way of looking at what that means is to grasp what 'unified intelligence' means. The higher genius exists in a state where, relative to our experience, it is completely in unity. No one part of itself is separate from another part. It does not experience the past, present or future as separate instances. There is no conventional experience of time, nor of space. No binary poles, no imbalance between poles and therefore absolutely no conflict.

When your higher genius contemplates your existence, therefore, it is aware of the entire map of your life from beginning to end, and every point in between. It knows what outcomes result from every action you perform, before you even perform those actions in time and space. It perceives your life as a unified whole, where every one thing in your life is balanced-out by another thing. It does not recognise any disharmony in you, because from its point of view a billion days

are balanced by a billion nights. A billion sorrows by a billion joys. All measured with complete exactitude to balance out.

The entire blueprint not only for your biological body and your mind exists in your higher genius but also the pattern which governs the unfolding of your life experience. This aspect of the higher genius is that which alchemists call both the quintessence (fifth Element or Q-state) and the Primum Ens (first being). For anyone who has studied the concept of the Q-state closely they will be aware that it has a codependent relationship with the incarnate self. The incarnate self is composed of the four Elements, as basic hermetic philosophy teaches. The Q-state is a condition which evolves out of the wedding or merging of the four Elements. In nature all things are slowly moving through an evolution which 'essentially' is a process whereby the four Elements (which are created in inequality) are slowly purifying and combining to form of fifth Element. Alchemists discovered this fact a very long time ago and the actual art of alchemy itself is a microcosmic reenactment of this evolution in the lab and at a faster pace.

The higher genius already contains everything you are, in potential, all bound up in one package. But no one thing can be discerned from another in that package. In order for that potential to unfold it must project itself in to time and space ... an environment designed specifically to take that single unit and 'express' each probability it contains, as separate instances, in a progressive flow. A good analogy of this idea is found in the relationship of an acorn to an oak tree. We know when we hold an acorn in our hand that this acorn contains within itself, in potential, an entire massive oak tree ... not only its bulk and diverse structure, but also its entire life. As soon as the acorn is placed in the right environment (the soil) and exposed to the correct degree of warmth (more than 10 degrees celsius) and moisture, an organic trigger is released and the 'plan' for the oak tree that exists inside the acorn starts to unfold. This plan is

two things: it is mental (information) and organic (a particular type of physical structure).

Your higher genius is exactly the same. When it projects itself into the physical universe (from outside), which is its fertile soil, and is exposed to the necessary conditions here, the YOU which sleeps in potential inside your higher genius sprouts and unfolds.

At the same time, the acorn that sprouts in to a mighty oak, the environmental conditions in which the oak has its existence mold the oak's condition. How large the tree grows, how healthy it is, how resistant to disease it becomes are all dependent on the conditions of the oak's environment. In turn, these impacts on the oak's existence play a major role on how its own seed develops. So the 'experience' that the oak unfolds in its life feeds-back to each new seed-form (Q-state), altering the potential of that seed, and defining the nature of each succeeding 'generation' (unfolding).

This analogy of the seed is perfect, because every type of seed in this world is literally the analogue of the higher genius of its species. That is, seeds are the hologram of the mental information blueprint of a species. The physical vehicle of the spiritus mundi. So everything you can recognise about seed, tells you something about the real nature of the higher genius.

In this way, over millions of years of evolution, the Q-state (higher genius, or seed-state), develops in to actuality that which once was hidden deep inside it, in potential. For the higher genius in its own natural state this is not evolution, because all that is happening is that something which already existed as unexpressed probability is now simply expressed as actual. The concept of evolution only happens in time and space, where something that previously was only a probability now develops into an actuality in a linear motion.

Our lives here in physical existence also run along that same feed-back loop. Everything we are here is an expression of a probability function, and once that expression has become reality its mere existence has added something (in a manner) back to the source. The nature of the blue print is changed by the events for which the blueprint is the original plan for. This is an extremely important concept. One which few people recognise, and when they do, few understand the implications of. Before anything else this concept teaches us that physical existence (your physical life) has a very specific purpose. It is not some cosmic accident, and it is not a series of random events.

In this way any desire to escape physical life and return to higher life, before the seed has completed its unfolding ... before the plan contained in the seed has played-out, is a pathological desire.

In the Western mystery tradition, today, we might encapsulate a definition of the motive for initiation in to the concept which students of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn call ... Knowledge and Conversation with the Higher Genius. (My paraphrase). Initiates in the Golden Dawn system, largely, see the end goal of their training as being the attainment of a state of mind wherein they can access the blueprint in the seed-self ... the higher genius. When we understand what the higher genius actually is, we can then understand why this goal is sort-after. Since the higher genius is the part of our existence which contains the blue print of our personal reality, if we can read that blue print we can learn by which route we might most quickly and effectively achieve the goals that have been set for us in this life. The benefit in taking that approach is found in the philosophy that we only experience difficulty and pain when we deviate from a close traverse of that source blue print. So if we can follow the plan for our life more closely, then we will experience more

satisfaction, security and abundance in our life, and less disappointment and discomfort.

Ultimately, if we can manage to completely give up our natural desire to control our lives, and allow our higher genius to incarnate its will directly in to our actions, we would experience no discomfort and we would completely expose ourselves to living events that are normally not probabilities for average humans. (You should re-read that and think about it carefully).

That idea is the internal expression of the Great Work. Making conscious and deliberate communication with our higher genius (Q-state). For laboratory alchemists the 'exact' same goal is sort after in the physical. The ultimate goal of the laboratory alchemist is ingestion of the elixir vitae ... which is itself a physical Q-state material. In other words, the elixir vitae IS the physical vehicle of the higher genius of the substance from which that remedy is made.

When you ingest such a substance you are LITERALLY taking the blueprint information of some living system, in a 'highly' purified and concentrated form, and you are putting that blue print (instruction program) inside of yourself. That highly pure and concentrated instruction program then over rides your standard homo sapiens program, and alters your life experience into something "more than human".

ESSAY FIFTY-ONE

Qabala - The Partzufim 3

The Neschamah and Chiah

Our reality begins with the higher genius, wherein the plan for what we can develop in to is stored. Because we live in a reality based on binary reality, it is extremely hard for us to imagine what condition our higher genius exists in. How does the blueprint for our complicated lives exist in a state of complete unity? Because contemplation of the unity state is so hard for our binary-function minds, when we find ourselves in the presence of our higher genius, while that experience is full of feelings of peace and wonder, we also cannot but help also feeling a little uncomfortable about being exposed to unity, something which is 'completely' foreign to our experience.

In order for our higher genius to 'express' its probability function, it has to divide itself. Ancient myths about creation, from various ancient cultures, give some very interesting, and often sexually graphic :) analogies as to how this division mechanism works. The detail is not important here. All we need to know is that the higher genius in its pure native state is passive and totally in balance. So of itself it cannot progress. In order to progress it needs to create a new state which is founded in the most basic requirements for change. That is ... binary existence. Since the unity state is "All There Is" (by its very nature), the unity intelligence (higher genius) can't go and take something else to create a two-thing condition. Because there is no-thing else. So the two-thing condition has to be created from the One-thing. So what the One-thing (higher genius) does is it divides itself ... and that first division is not in to two equal parts. If the One-thing divided itself in to two equal

parts then we would have a 'complete' harmony ... so no binary, per sae.

When the 'unit' divides itself the first state of mind that arises are those intelligences which qabalists call ... chiah and neschamah.

The first important thing to realise about chiah and neschamah (on the diagram chiah = higher will, neschamah = desire for unity), is that while they are yechidah (higher genius) 'split', and to some degree unequal in division (necessarily) ... they are the most mature and balanced 'poles' of a binary in existence. They are the two sides of a binary seriously desiring total integration ... as opposed to the concept of two poles in conflict. They are separate but do not have a problem with each other. That is a nice way of viewing them. This is the case because this division is occurring at a level of reality, beyond physicality, directly in close agreement with their source ... which is total harmony.

The Chiah

The Chiah is the first extension from unity, as soon as unity decides to divide. Remembering that the original unity is passive ... a decision to change that is an 'active' choice. Yechidah is saying ... "I'm all this stuff (potentially) but I can't see exactly what stuff I am, because it is all bunched up together" ... so in order to 'see' what stuff I am I need to separate everything from everything. That decision, and its action, is what 'chiah' represents. The move from passive to active, and the move from unity to division. This 'active' behaviour we refer to as a 'masculine' characteristic.

In hermetic philosophy, and in Western hermetic training, the sphere of the chiah is given attributes such as 'wisdom' and 'master of magic' and 'master of alchemy' ... because the kind of stuff that this intelligence governs is intimately connected to

the loftiest ideals of existence. The highest level of intelligence (wisdom). The greatest control over reality (alchemy) and the highest expression of human endeavour (magic).

An individual who has developed him or her self to the level of having the chiah fully controlling the mind, is someone who has easy access to ageless wisdom, full knowledge and capability of alchemical process, and complete mastery of magical process.

In laboratory alchemy, a substance (or complex of substances) that has been raised to this level of existence is a substance that 'automatically' evolves itself, and FORCES that evolution on to other substances it is combined with. It cannot be helped. Ingestion of a 'chiah-state' substance will not only force quick and efficient alchemical evolution, but that evolution cannot be reversed. Chiah is 'higher will' ... and that means a force for evolution that cannot be debated with. Chiah does not know 'doubt' or 'resistance' or 'alternatives' ... it is one-pointed goal without opposition.

The Neschamah

While we can say that chiah is the energy pole of the first binary, neschamah, which is created almost equally immediately as the chiah is created, upon that first sission, she is the polar opposite to energy ... that is, she is the 'body' or 'container' of the first impulse to divide. In this way qabalists refer to her as 'the presence' (shekinah) of God. That is, she is the 'form' in which the unity intelligence takes shape. To this end because she is not herself the One unit, she must manifest a desire to unite with the One unit. In this way she is referred to as the 'desire for unity' (neschamah).

Neschamah is the container of the three supernals. In the Golden Dawn system she is represented by the Hebrew letter Shin which is an icon depicting three fires (the three most

volatile aspects of reality), displayed by the three 'flames' at the top of the letter, united by a common identity, shown by the bar at the bottom of the letter. For me this Hebrew letter is the best representation of the manifestation of the Q-state in qabalisim.

As with the other supernal intelligences, neschamah herself grows and develops the more the lower intelligences grow and develop. She is the desire in us to have knowledge and conversation with the higher genius ... so the more the lower intelligences unite, and by that unification decrease conflict, the more they desire unity, because unity is growing in them. This increased 'wedding' of the lower nature is an increase in the neschamah function.

The mechanism which allows the lower functions (which are naturally opposed) to begin to merge and unify, is 'understanding'. While the lower functions are separated and in opposition, that separation is a function of ignorance. The opposite condition to that natural ignorance is of course 'understanding'. When the lower functions begin to understand each other they also begin to unify. For this reason neschamah is also labelled 'Understanding'. Because when true understanding begins to evolve in us, so too does the neschamah evolve and develop. As neschamah evolves and develops we begin to 'feel' an increasing pull toward spiritual life (desire for unity). It should be noted that I don't refer here to an intellectual interest in occultism. I refer specifically to a powerful urge to unite with the higher genius that overtakes every other desire in life. An urge so strong that the individual will forsake every other normal desire in order to attain that spiritual Illumination. When that desire is firmly rooted in the individual's life, we can say that the neschamah intelligence has prime control over the individual's way of thinking and feeling, and hence their life. An individual (initiate) fully possessed by the influence of his or her neschamah will happily ignore the normal ties to friends, employment and family, without fear of disaster, to walk the path of higher learning.

They do not fear to put that journey before everything else in their lives because neschamah, active in their mind, bestows a powerful intuition that somehow those higher functions will arrange life experience to take care of itself, so that the initiate's attention can be shifted from its focus on mundane survival on to its esoteric survival. The true initiate *clicks* in to that intuition automatically. The student of occultism who does not experience that neschamah state naturally fears removing his or her attention from basic animal instinct ... securing shelter, food and procreation ... as their primary obsession survival instinct.

Qabalists also refer to chiah and neschamah as 'father' and 'mother' (respectively), because they are the mature (evolved) binary functions of the mind.

Neschamah is also that part of the mind to which all of our life experiences (memories) return after our natural death. She contains the essence of everything we have ever been and experienced.

ESSAY FIFTY-TWO

Qabala - The Partzufim 4

Ruach and Nephesch

Yechidah, Chiah and Neschamah exist above that dividing line qabalists refer to as the abyss. That dividing line separates that which in us is immortal (the supernals), and that part of us which is temporal (physical and temporary). This demarkation separates the partzufim into two groups of three intelligences each. I've explained the basic nature of the 'upper' three (which I call the higher functions), now we will look at the 'lower' three. Starting with ruach and nephesch.

Just as neschamah and chiah form the upper and mature binary-pair, ruach and nephesch form a lower and (we might say) adolescent binary-pair. Ruach and nephesch are the chiah and neschamah in their undeveloped state. As with all the prime intelligences qabalists give ruach and nephesch a number of names which describe the details of their nature. The important ones for our purpose are ... "son and daughter" ... remembering that neschamah and chiah are 'mother and father'. Also ... "King and Queen" ... and ... "groom and bride".

Every living human ... the incarnate worldly part of ourselves, is governed by nephesch and ruach. They are not only the two poles of our lower mind, they also govern the male and female aspects of our physicality.

The well known hermetic axiom 'as above, so below' governs here. we are male and/or female outside just as we are male and female inside.

Ruach

The ruach is that part of our mental equipment that 'thinks' (reasons). Ruach looks out at the world, assesses what it sees and experiences, and forms ideas and plans. This is its primary purpose. It is designed to allow the human individual to survive in the world by trying to understand the nature of life, deal with circumstances and attain goals it sets for itself. Sometimes ruach is referred to as the objective consciousness, because its task is to deal with the physical world in all of its aspects.

Human males are the physical expression of the ruach. That is, males are bias toward ruach-function in the way they mentally deal with life, and that ruach-bias condition caused the feotus to develop a male gender physical body.

Modern science is the ultimate expression of ruach-function in the wider world. Cell phones, automobiles, jet fighters, space ships and nuclear weapons are examples of what ruach can do when it reaches its fullest ability as the 'thinker'. Mathematics might be said to be the purest and highest form of ruach-thinking.

Ruach is the 'king' of the human (incarnate) living system. His thinking-function governs the individual human life. He is also the 'groom', in that his natural mate is the nepesch. He is also associated with the sun, mythologically, and for this reason is sometimes referred to as the solar intelligence. In alchemical symbolism the ruach is the intelligence incarnate in the substance(s) which the lab alchemist refers to as 'the king'.

Nepesch

Nepesch is the polar opposite to ruach. While ruach was designed by nature to observe and deal with the outer world, nepesch was designed to look inward and deal with the inner world. She is the 'feeling' function, and the unconscious aspect of mind. One of her primary functions is to store memory. That is, she stores everything ruach 'sees' and experiences in the

outer world. Just as ruach is 'active-expressive' outwardly in the world, nephesch is 'passive-receptive' in the inner world.

Human females are the physical expression of nephesch. That is, females are bias toward nephesch-function in the way they mentally deal with reality. The nephesch-bias mental condition in a developing feotus causes the physical body to develop female gender.

Visual art, sculpture, music, fictional literature and dance are examples of the expression of nephesch in the outer world.

Nephesch is the qabalistic and alchemic 'Queen' of the individual living system. She is associated with the moon, symbolically.

In her role as memory storage nephesch also 'remembers' all biological functions of the living system (human individual). In this way she governs all bodily functions such as heart beat, body temperature, digestion, etc. All those things which continue on inside us without need for our conscious (ruach) awareness. These bodily functions are all maintained by biological 'habit'. Habit is another important function of nephesch. Everything put into nephesch and which is repeated enough, she turns into a habit.

ESSAY FIFTY-THREE

Qabala - The Partzufim 5

The Nachash

The Hebrew word nachash translates roughly as dragon or serpent. The qabalistic nachash is the intelligence I refer to as 'sustainer of division' in the partzufim Tree of Life diagram, and occupies the lowest sphere on the Tree of Life.

The nachash is probably the least discussed and least understood of the primary intelligences.

I have already showed how neschamah and chiah form an advanced binary pair. Also how nephesch and ruach form a lower binary pair. There is one more binary pair formed among the prime intelligences between yechidah (the Higher Genius) and nachash (the dragon). At one end of this third binary we have complete unity (yechidah), at the other end complete division (nachash).

Nachash arose at the very dawn of creation, as it is this intelligence that is responsible for maintaining the division that the 'One' brought about in itself in order to move from unity to a state that could evolve. This is a very important concept to grasp if we are to understand the very root cause of physical (temporal) existence.

When the One divided itself that division had to be in to two unequal parts. Equal parts would have only served to maintain harmony, and thus unity. From this we understand that one of the root functions of physical existence is that all things exist in binary, and that the two poles of every binary are out of balance. Where we have a binary with unequal poles we will also have opposition, tension and ultimately conflict. For this

reason the old qabalists gave to the head of nachash the additional label 'two contending forces'. Therefore when we talk about nachash being the intelligence which sustains division, we recognise that it also maintains imbalance and conflict.

It is nevertheless important to remember that while nachash is the root force which maintains the existence of physical reality, that it performs this function by the Will of the One, which Itself chose to create division and temporal reality for a specific purpose.

When considering the mechanics of hermetic initiation, this entire scenario is extremely important, and central to the way in which any successful initiatory process must operate. Initiation is a progressive return to awareness of the totality of oneself. That which the hermetic tradition has referred to as 'Illumination'. A close communication with the intelligence of Unity (yechidah), which alone has full knowledge and understanding of the living system it governs. But Unity Itself desires first, before Illumination can be attained, that Its awareness enters in to temporal existence in order to unfold and express the potential that it is. Thus, nachash was created to enable this temporal existence, and the ability to unfold and evolve in binary reality. Any desire by the incarnate personality to return to communion with Unity cannot, therefore, be fulfilled until the purpose of being incarnate in binary reality has itself been worked out to its natural and intended conclusion.

To this end, the function of nachash as sustainer of division in living systems plays a very curious role in the process of initiation. Whenever any human makes an honest and concerted effort to be accepted as the pupil of an hermetic initiator, and thereby to attain Illumination, this action runs contrary to the nachash function. Since nachash has the task of maintaining division, the moment someone attempts to attain unity that action evokes the attention of the nachash, who then immediately opposes the move toward initiatory training.

This is a very important secret of the initiatory process. Hermetic tradition has created a really interesting analogy in which to clothe and veil the secrets of this function of nachash. In this analogy the realm of training and the attainment of Illumination (ingress into the great mysteries of nature) is referred to as 'The Temple of the Ancient Mysteries'. An attempt at being an initiate, and therefore gaining access to the deep and hidden secrets of nature, is described in this analogy as an attempt at gaining entrance into the Temple of the Mysteries. This analogy, further, tells us that on the metaphorical porch or 'threshold' of this Temple stands a guardian, whose job it is to guard the Gateway to the Mysteries.

That guardian is of course the nachash, and this hermetic analogy tells us that if we want to succeed in our desire to enter-in through the Gate to the Temple of the Mysteries, we first have to overcome the guardian upon the Threshold, who, we are assured ... holds the Keys to the Gate.

In order to succeed in this hermetic trial the initiate must prove to the guardian, quite literally, that he has evolved to the point where incarnation in temporal reality is no longer necessary. This proof comes in the form of solving a riddle which the guardian poses to the aspirant. The nature of this interaction, and especially the existence of this riddle and its solution, are still one of the most closely held secret aspects of the 'true' initiatory journey.

The function of nachash as guardian upon the Threshold can be seen symbolically depicted in the 15th card of the Major Arcana of the tarot. One of the better depictions of this secret, in my humble opinion, can be seen in the Rider-Waite version of this tarot trump, where we clearly recognise nephesh and ruach chained to an 'altar' which is a 'double' cube (binary existence) surmounted by Baphomet, Eiphas Levi's preferred symbol for the nachash.

This now completes my introduction to the basic concepts connected with the individual partzufim. In my next essay I will begin to discuss how these prime intelligences function in each human as the foundation machinery of the mind.

ESSAY FIFTY-FOUR

Qabala - The Partzufim 6

The Machinery of Mind

Because the two poles of any binary are, at their source, the same unified One, in a manner division is an illusion. In this way the two poles of any natural binary are two sides of the same coin. Two ways of looking at the same thing. For our purposes one way of looking at this is that laboratory alchemy (esoteric physics/chemistry) is the natural opposite binary pole of internal alchemy (esoteric psychology).

In the practice of attempting to understand the secrets of lab alchemy, we can therefore learn a great deal by studying (esoteric) psychological alchemy and then making comparisons between the mechanics of the inner work with the mechanics of the outer work. While they appear different, they are, at their root, based on the same natural rules.

Every average human's mind is rooted in the six primary intelligences I have previously described. That is, if we have the ability to look inside the core of the mind of any human, and investigate what we see there, we will find each of these six intelligences living there, governing the various operations of the mind and of the body. It can be helpful to think of these intelligences as being like the software of the human organism, each with a specific purpose, governing specific functions ... such as thought, digestion, feeling, cell division, etc.

When peeking into the mind of an average person, in order to observe the working of each of the six intelligences, we are nevertheless confronted with a problem. The higher functions (the three superior intelligences), will remain concealed, for the most part, deep in the unconscious. But even though the higher

functions remain concealed, they never cease to govern the lower life, entirely, both in body and mind, and in fate. Due to this concealment, though, the lower intelligences are utterly convinced that they are the only intelligences responsible for the maintenance and safety of the human self, and that no other parts of the mind exist, or have superior government.

Because the lower functions are designed by nature to maintain life in the physical (and not to have an interest in the non-physical), and due to their believing they are the sole and superior government of the human self, the average person's true focus remains on physical life and the belief in its exclusive importance. Even in the average person (non-initiate) who professes a deep interest in things spiritual, because his mind is governed by the lower functions he is compelled to attend to physical concerns before any real focus on spiritual concerns is taken seriously. If some kind of problem occurs in his mundane life, he will either drop everything spiritual in order to attend to it, or he will attempt to focus all his spiritual efforts on fixing it.

The problem with this situation, where an individual who really wants to advance spiritually, is concerned, is that their view of reality is upside down. Because they have no 'experience' (serious knowledge) of their higher functions, and therefore their lower functions govern their approach to life ... the average occultist behaves as if the success or failure of his life depends on his (his lower self's) ability to control his life. Whereas, the 'truth' is that success or failure in life is not dependant on the lower self, it is entirely governed by the higher functions, which never fail in their plans. this is a very important concept, because it basically defines the difference between a real initiate (who 'knows' his higher functions rule his life, and behaves accordingly), and the mainstream initiate, who most often seeks occult accomplishment because he believes it will give him (the lower self) the ability to control his life more effectively.

The average occultist (part of mainstream occultism) only becomes a real initiate at the point where his higher functions become intimately known to him, and the higher and lower work together to orient the initiate's life in the strict direction laid out by the higher functions. But we must be careful when considering that this situation might have been attained. The link between the lower functions and the higher NEVER happens by accident, and it CANNOT be opened by an individual who has not been taught how that works by someone who has already been successfully trained by another person who has that link active. This is an essential concept, and one I press often, because I have met a lot of individuals in my life who insist they opened a link with their higher functions, alone. But when their situation is examined closely, it becomes obvious that what they are experiencing is a complex delusion manufactured by the lower functions, designed to trick the individual into believing the ultimate goal of spiritual aspiration has been gained. Thus, if the individual believes they are already illuminated by their higher functions, they are not going to waste any time in attempting to achieve that goal.

At the death of the human living system the higher functions and ruach separate from the nephesh, and they all from the organic body. In alchemical terms the Elements of Fire and Air separate from the Water and Earth, respectively. The minerals of the physical body return to the earth from which they came. The nephesh putrefies and decomposes, and the ruach carries with itself the individuality of the now dead human, and as 'Air' it is attracted to the Fire of the higher functions and nourishes the immortal portion of ourselves. In this way everything we were in life is gathered up into the neschamah, who stores and nurtures everything we were, and keeps us until the law of necessity requires our essence to once again incarnate.

This dynamic is both natural and alchemical. The process of hermetic initiation follows this same natural pattern, as does the

Great Work of the laboratory. In order for the self or 'matter' to return to the higher functions or quintessential self, first the lower self (or matter) must die, the Elements be separated, and the Spirit (ruach) be once again united with the Fire (neschamah).

ESSAY FIFTY-FIVE

Qabala - The Partzufim 7

The Natural Development of the Common Mind.

In order to understand what we are as humans, it is first necessary to understand how the mind developed in each of us.

At conception the developing foetus receives its instruction as to how to grow from the 'spiritus mundi' ... the memory of the world. That which we refer to today as the collective unconscious. Inside the collective unconscious of the human race exists the memory of over a million years of human biological evolution. Every single change in human biological evolution that has happened to us since we were single celled organisms, right up to the complex organic mechanisms we are today, is perfectly recorded in the memory of nature. In this way, the moment that a male and female human come together to conceive a new child, the memory of nature instructs that single fertilised cell in how to unfold, in order to produce a human body.

At the same time that the 'collective' unconscious is telling all those cells how to divide and develop, the neschamah (the manifestation of the unified self) attaches itself to the foetus. This attachment causes a section of the collective unconscious to separate itself and become personal to the foetus, containing a blank blueprint of the basic functions of the mind ready to be imprinted upon. At the same time a seed ruach is created. This personal unconscious (nepesch) and seed ruach are the two poles of the human mind.

It is important at this point to remember that 'qabalistically' the 'unconscious' is known as the nepesch (animal soul). So in this unfolding of the human foetus the 'collective' (race)

nepesch is playing a role, as well as the personal nepesch. Through the personal nepesch all the quirks of nature peculiar to the incarnating individual are passed on from the neschamah, then impressed upon the developing foetus. This ensures that when the child is born, its physical characteristics will reflect the peculiar quirks of the person incarnating. In this way, we don't simply possess characteristics of our parents, from their genes, but we also express (physically) idiosyncrasies of our inner selves, through our physical bodies.

The moment a new foetus is conceived, it is manipulated by a part of the mind that pre-exists the physical body. That is, the nepesch is older than the foetus. We know this because the nepesch contains the structure required to maintain personal integrity, and to support the development of the ruach. At conception the newest part of the mind (historically) is also created, the ruach, or thinking mind. At conception the ruach remains passive, waiting to be kicked in to life at the exact moment the new born child takes its first breath. At that first breath (the Element of Air), the ruach is shocked into action ... and it begins the function that nature has designed it for ... to experience and observe the physical world through the five senses, to analyse those experiences and develop plans for dealing with them productively.

In early childhood the ruach is so new that it barely functions. It simply absorbs sensory information from outside, without the ability as yet to judge. At this stage of development the nepesch is still primarily in control. One of the important functions of nepesch that it is necessary to understand at this stage is its suggestibility, and its inability to judge. In this way when ever some experience arrives in the new infant's reality, it is absorbed by the mind without judgment. So, for example, everything that is spoken to a new infant is not passed through any kind of internal sensory filter. So everything a baby is told is taken literally. For example, when a parent or sibling tells the new child ... "this is a tree" ... the new child has no ability to

question that information, and that information is impressed on the mind directly, without question. In this way we learn everything about the world from the people who spend the most time with us as small babies, and who describe the world to us ... and what we learn we absorb without judgment (at first).

These ideas about reality then become the very foundation upon which we are able to relate to the world. If you have been thinking about this carefully, you should now begin to see that everything we believe about life is influenced by what our parents and siblings demonstrated to us as infants. In this way we inherit a view of the world from our family, as surely as we inherit our genes from our parents. Why one person prefers blue cars and another prefers to ride motorbikes are all the result of situations that impressed themselves on the mind during childhood. These things then become the main source of our motivations, preferences and predispositions. The main source, but not the only source. Because we are also driven, to a greater or lesser degree, by our higher functions.

It takes our ruach roughly seven years to develop to the stage where it no longer just receives information about the world through the five senses, but now starts to 'think' about that input, and make its own decisions about what it perceives. So before that stage in our development, we experience roughly seven years of 'programming' into the meaning of life.

An important part of this mechanism is trauma. In that first seven years of life, while we are highly suggestible, and susceptible to our inability to form educated judgments, if we experience any kind of trauma, that impact on us distorts our view of reality to some degree. This is how, for example, phobias originate. If the first time we experience a spider (for example), and that experience happens in a frightening way, then the fear and confusion impressed on the child mind will distort the mind slightly, and affect the individual's relationship with spiders for the rest of its life. (Unless therapy changes that

distortion). Many of the diseases of the human mind begin this way.

As we pass from childhood into adolescence and adulthood, then, almost every single choice we make in life ... every single belief we take on ... is to some degree influenced by the information we were fed and picked up as small children. This influence on our lives is so deeply impressed in us, and so unconscious, that we are mostly never aware it is happening. We don't even suspect this mechanism exists. The result of this is that when we make decisions as adults, or form new beliefs, we seriously believe these actions are our own ... choices we make entirely for ourselves. But this is an illusion.

The everyday person is, then, a combination of influences from a number of sources. Influence from the collective unconscious. Influence from the personal unconscious, inherited at birth from the accumulation of past life experience stored in the higher functions. Influence from parents, siblings and trauma. Also influences from the decisions our own reach makes, based on all these other influences.

ESSAY FIFTY-SIX

Qabala - The Partzufim 8

Life, Mental Health and Death

So I have described how a human comes in to physical life, and the role the Partzufim play in that process. Now I am going to explain how the Partzufim function during life, and through the death process. At that point we will be ready to grasp how alchemy affects the Partzufim, and how that leads eventually to esoteric initiation.

During the normal function of life the average individual is only aware of the three lower functions of the mind. When he thinks, he is using his ruach. When he experiences emotion, and accesses memory, he is using his nepesch. The nepesch is also the source of instinct, which is a feeling that arises from the unconscious as the result of accumulated past experience. When we fall asleep at night our awareness moves from the ruach (conscious awareness) into the nepesch (unconsciousness). When we begin to wake from sleep, and become aware of dreams, the dream itself is an attempt by the deeper mind to translate what was happening in the unconscious (during sleep) in to terms the conscious mind can identify with.

Under normal conditions the mind has placed a barrier between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind. When we fall in to sleep we cross that barrier, and when we wake we come back across that barrier. The existence of this barrier is what causes us to not be able to remember what was happening to us while we were in deep unconscious sleep. As we wake and come back across that barrier the memory of our night-adventures remains on the other side of the barrier. This barrier exists in order to keep the content of the unconscious

out of our conscious awareness. This is necessary because if we were fully aware of everything contained in the unconscious, the sheer volume of information would overwhelm us.

In certain types of mental illness this barrier is damaged, often because the individual is exposed to some kind of extreme trauma, or because of damage to the organic body. When this barrier is damaged some of the content of the unconscious leaks out of the dark-hidden self and is projected on to the conscious awareness. When this first starts to happen the individual will experience a distinct unease, for which he has no reference as to its source. At the same time the individual may experience auditory, visual, tactile and olfactory hallucinations. This condition is commonly referred to as 'psychosis'. In its advanced staged psychosis can produce hallucinations so vivid the individual cannot distinguish 'reality' from (psychotic) 'delusion'. At its most advanced psychosis is referred to as schizophrenia, a condition where full-blown hallucinations are common and completely real for the ill individual. Because these hallucinations are caused by leakage from the unconscious, and because part of the content of the unconscious is repressed material which we do not or can not face, this leakage can cause 'unease' to develop in to anxiety, paranoia and serious fear. An individual who suffers extreme psychosis is therefore often referred to as being a paranoid psychotic, or a paranoid schizophrenic, because of the fear which often accompanies the hallucinatory condition.

This kind of illness results from a dysfunctional condition of the barrier between nephesch and ruach, usually through some kind of shock to the individual. But there is also a healthy type of opening of this barrier, which we see in individuals who display advanced psychic abilities. This condition never happens by accident, but is always the result of the practice of esoteric exercises designed specifically to open a doorway in the mind-barrier, either in this life or a previous incarnation. The psychism that arises as a symptom of the healthy opening of

this barrier occurs because inside the unconscious our higher functions are also hidden. So when a door is opened in the mind-barrier through expert application of esoteric exercises, some degree of leakage of the higher functions, in to conscious awareness, results.

At the death of the individual, the nephesch and ruach separate from the physical body, and from each other. Because of the close affinity the nephesch has with the physical body (since nephesch contains the memory of nature that designs and maintains automatic physical functions), the nephesch dwells close to the physical body, and under normal conditions, as the physical body decomposes, the nephesch also decomposes. But under certain conditions, usually accidental, a situation can arise which interrupts the normal decomposition of the nephesch, and she does not decay. The result is what we commonly call a ghost.

Once the nephesch and ruach separate, the ruach takes with it the memory of the individual's life. The ruach then undergoes a process whereby the events of the individual's life are remembered, and the 'dross' is separated from the 'essence'. This essence of the individual's life is then passed on from the ruach to the neschamah, where the neschamah is the storage facility of the essential memories of the soul's entire existence.

It is from this accumulated storage of the experience of many lives that our higher functions gain their 'understanding' and 'wisdom'. While alive (incarnate) the average individual only has access to knowledge accumulated in that single life. Because of this we all, as a species, have developed a particular view of reality, tainted by the limits of our individual perception. But an Illuminated initiate also has access to the higher functions, and therefore has a special view of reality, the type of which is the result of having access to knowledge and understanding accumulated over many dozens of lives. To be

able to view life from the perspective of the many and various angles that the collected wisdom of many lives provides, allows such an individual to not only have a very advanced level of understanding, but also to be capable of things the average human is not capable of.

The reason why the afterlife state is said to be 'heavenly', is primarily because as conscious awareness rides on the back of the ruach, as it rises to rejoin the higher functions, the individual's mind is thereby freed from the limitations of the single-life view of reality, and migrates back to the higher functions where awareness once again enjoys the point of view of the essence of many lives.

In laboratory alchemy the exact same process that living beings go through during death, is re-enacted inside the flasks of retorts of the alchemical process. The substance which the alchemist is working on is first 'killed', but in such a way that none of the pieces of the living system are lost to the environment. Then, in vitro, the four Elements of the living system (body, nepesch, ruach and neschamah) are separated. The body, ruach and neschamah are purified, and the nepesch is eliminated. Then the ruach is reunited with the neschamah, and these two are united with the pure body, to serve as the physical vehicle of the now higher functions (united ruach-neschamah).

A number of alchemist Adepts in past ages have made the important point that if the student of alchemy cannot 'see' the alchemical process operating in his-self, then he is unlikely to 'see' that process operating outside of him, and in his laboratory. The exclamation is often made that the crude matter for the Philosopher's Stone is to be found in ourselves ... and this is the truth. All living systems are constructed of the same 'Elements', and therefore the Great Work can ideally be performed on any living system, including on ourselves. The proof of this is in the pudding ... and I have seen that proof ...

that just as we might produce alchemical products in the lab that can rejuvenate (transmute) our physical bodies and individual minds, so too can we perform certain secret inner (psychological) processes which will force the same effects on our minds and bodies, as the al-chemical products force. There literally is an internal Elixir Vitae, just as there is a physical one, and the results of taking the inner elixir are literally as powerful and immediate as ingesting the physical elixir. That is no theory, it is a proven fact.

ESSAY FIFTY-SEVEN

Qabala - The Partzufim 9

The Relationship Between the Lab and the Mind.

We can now start to pull together some of the essential ideas, previously discussed, in order to be able to understand this next concept ... how the alchemical lab process is a reflection of the alchemical inner process.

To begin, we need to grasp the idea that everything we experience is really One Thing. The Emerald Tablet, which describes the most essential concepts of Hermetic thought and mechanics, makes this abundantly clear. We only experience reality as a multitude of separate things because we are immersed in a situation that causes our perception of The One to be fractured into many facets of Itself.

On the most basic level this One Thing splits itself in to two things, and to our consciousness and experience the most basic form of this sission is the 'mind-body' binary. That is, we experience ourselves as both a physical object in a physical environment, and as a non-physical self in a non-physical environment. There is a part which is physical, and a part which is mental.

Now, because we postulate that in fact ... All Is One ... and that One splits into two ... it shouldn't be hard to grasp the idea that the two-things arise from the One-Thing and therefore each piece of the two-thing is produced out of the same-thing. This means that the same rules which govern the One-Thing also govern both pieces of the Two-Thing. While each side of the two-thing looks different from its opposite, "essentially" they are the same. It is also hard, if we know one side of the binary in detail, and accurately, to see how the rules of that one side are

also governing the other side. This is because the basic governing rules are adapted to the conditions of each side ... physical and mental ... differently. It is like looking at an athlete running a marathon, and a car moving down the street, and recognising how the laws of 'internal combustion' govern the mobility of both circumstances.

Laboratory alchemy exists as a method for studying and observing how the mechanics of "alchemy" (aka: natural process), functions in the physical side of reality. That is, we can discover and learn the secret rules which govern physical existence by studying lab alchemy. This is the 'body' side of the mind-body binary. Lab alchemy manipulates living systems through directly manipulating their physical bodies.

If the two things ... the mind and the body ... arise out of One Thing, and therefore the same rules that govern the one thing also govern each side of the two-things, then whatever we can discover about alchemy as it manifests in physical things, we must also be able to translate those concepts to the inner life ... if we know how that is done.

In the physical world alchemists know that all matter is composed of four (alchemical) Elements. Minerals (Earth), Form (Water), Energy (Fire) and Information (Air). In the non-physical we also find four (alchemical) Elements: Earth (Nachash), Water (Nepesch), Air (Ruach) and Fire (Neschamah-Chiah-Yechidah). In mainstream occultism this connection has not been accurately made anywhere that I am aware of. It is obvious that some few mainstream occultists are aware that there is supposed to be a link between the esoteric structure and dynamics of the inner and outer worlds, but I have never seen anywhere where there has been a reasonable understanding of how this works. Most magicians (who primarily deal with the 'inner' Hermetic mechanics), and most alchemists (who primarily deal with the 'outer' Hermetic mechanics), stay on their own side of the fence. While a good number of esoteric

alchemists understand that the inside and outside worlds are supposed to be linked in some way, based on the same set of natural laws, I have found that few individuals who primarily study Hermetic magic have any realisation of this concept.

The fundamental theory is based on one of the key phrases in the Emerald Tablet ... "as above, so below. As below, so above, for the benefit of the One Thing"

While this statement is obviously symbolic, so that it might be interpreted on a number of levels, one sure aspect of interpretation sees 'above' as referring to the inner man (his psyche), and 'below' as referring to the physical world.

It is important to also point out that when we consider the idea 'man's psyche', we should not fall in to the trap of assuming this means that the mind is only 'inside'. This really just points to the individual's personal share of the universal mind. For, as the authors of the Kybalion made quite clear "all is mind". That is, the feild of reality we commonly refer to as physical reality is also, in fact, a level of mind-stuff. Speaking from a more technical angle ... when we look out on to the physical world around us, we literally are looking at a hardcopy of the race-mind, and of our own individual mind superimposed upon it.

This comes back to the idea that essentially 'all is One' ... that is, all is mind, and that the concepts 'inside' and 'outside' (mind and matter) are just an abboration of our perception. They are two sides, a 'hard version' and a 'soft version' of the same One-state. In this way there is a direct correspondence between what is inside us and what we see outside us. For example, we are populated internally by a vast number of 'intelligences' (sub-personalities and archetypes), and when we look outside of ourselves we also recognise that the outer world is populated with common personalities and ruling authorities.

From this understanding we can recognise that all things contain intelligence. Since mind and information are the very building-stuff of reality. From this we can begin to grasp that even in the lab we are manipulating mind and information when we perform alchemical procedures on physical substances. When we take in to hand a complete living system, such as a plant, to work on it alchemically, we are manipulating the same basic format of intelligences that we find described in the fundamentals of qabalistic philosophy. Just as the alchemist has a higher genius, chiah, neschamah, ruach, nepesch and nachash, so too does a plant or animal, albeit the case that in plants the individual nepesch and the ruach are only potential states, just as neschamah and chiah are in humanity. Likewise in animals the individual nepesch is active, but the ruach exists still in potential only.

In this way the alchemist who is properly trained in the requisite technique can not only watch the alchemical progress in a mineral, plant or animal in the lab, at physical level, but also 'see' and communicate with the non-physical level of the 'matter' in the flask, and watch how alchemy unfolds on the inner level at the same time.

ESSAY FIFTY-EIGHT

Qabala - The Partzufim 10

The Partzufim in Folklore, Dreams and Story telling.

One of the curious things about the partzufim is that because the six primary intelligences, which form the foundation of the human mind, are an intimate part of what we are, we find examples of their dynamics in all kinds of interesting places. One of the things I like about this aspect of the partzufim is that it demonstrates that this concept is not 'owned' by the Hebrew qabala. That is, it was not created by the old Hebrew qabalists, and did not exist solely in their qabala. It is not only a natural part of human makeup, just as having arms or kidneys is, but knowledge and recognition of this part of ourselves appears in many different culture's art and esoteric lore, any different ages, predating the dawn of the Hebrew culture and esoteric tradition.

For example, when we dream, all male figures in our dreams (no matter who they may 'look' like), are actually aspects of our ruach or chiah, or on rare occasions, our yechidah or nachash. Likewise, all female figures in our dreams are aspects of our nepesch or neschamah. So if we know how to interpret our dreams 'qabalistically' (in reference to the partzufim), we can learn a huge amount about the inner workings of our mind. In doing this we learn that dreams are actually stories being told to us by the unconscious, about itself. This is why certain branches of psychology are interested in dream interpretation, because dreams provide a window into the life of the unconscious universe. When we learn to look through that window we discover that in the unconscious, the partzufim live, just as you and I live, move and have our being in the conscious world. So the partzufim are not simply funky esoteric concepts, they are living, evolving, intelligent lifeforms.

Knowledge of this fact has been had for 1000s of years, and mostly been kept a closely guarded secret. Because if we come to understand exactly what the consequences of the reality of the partzufim are, we can gain control over reality. Even though accurate and indepth knowledge of the nature of the partzufim has always been kept a closely guarded secret, it is a curious fact that the old Adepts of the Hermetic tradition preserved that knowledge in 'story lore'. This way of preserving esoteric knowledge concerning the partzufim has taken a number of formats in the past.

There is the more secretive story-lore such as we find in the tales which make up a big part of deeper qabala. Most of this aspect of qabala is found described in the Sepher Ha Zohar, where we can see stories told about the lives and trials of the partzufim. Today this is the least paid attention to, and least understood aspect of qabala. But for those who now where to look, and who understand what they are looking at, these stories about the partzufim contain a huge depth of knowledge about the nature of our foundational intelligences. They are testament to the extreme amount of technical understanding the old Adepts collected about the machinery of the mind. In that, once we become familiar with this aspect of qabala and come to understand it, we realise that even though we can recognise the remnants of a once seriously outstanding science of mind, we can also see that what we see in the Zohar, for example, is the rubble of a once much more extensive edifice, now mostly lost to the ravages of time. But enough still exists in order for us to be able to piece back together the framework of that body of knowledge ... once we have the 'method' of rediscovering it.

So, the qabalistic stories in works like the Zohar are examples of the most esoteric level of story-lore concerning the partzufim. In the middle ground we have another really interesting example in the very ancient collection of stories which today we know as ... 'A Thousand and One Nights', also

known euphemistically as 'Arabian Nights'. I'm going to paraphrase wikipedia here, in giving a little bit of historic background, because wiki does it better than I do ...

A Thousand and One Nights is a collection of West and South Asian stories and folk tales compiled in Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age. It is often known in English as the Arabian Nights, from the first English language edition (1706), which rendered the title as The Arabian Nights' Entertainment. The work was collected over many centuries by various authors, translators, and scholars across West, Central, South Asia and North Africa. The tales themselves trace their roots back to ancient and medieval Arabic, Persian, Indian, Egyptian and Mesopotamian folklore and literature. In particular, many tales were originally folk stories from the Caliphate era, while others, especially the frame story, are most probably drawn from the Pahlavi Persian work Hazar Afsan (Persian: A Thousand Tales) which in turn relied partly on Indian elements.

What is common throughout all the editions of the Nights is the initial frame story of the ruler Shahryar (from Persian: ????????, meaning "king" or "sovereign") and his wife Scheherazade (from Persian: ????????, possibly meaning "of noble lineage") and the framing device incorporated throughout the tales themselves. The stories proceed from this original tale; some are framed within other tales, while others begin and end of their own accord. Some editions contain only a few hundred nights, while others include 1,001 or more. The bulk of the text is in prose, although verse is occasionally used to express heightened emotion, and for songs and riddles. Most of the poems are single couplets or quatrains, although some are longer.

Anyone who is already familiar with A Thousand and One Nights might have heard that some of the stories of The Nights, are well known children's stories in the West, particularly "Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp", "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves"

and "The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor". But while almost certainly genuine Middle Eastern folk tales, they were not part of The Nights in Arabic versions, but were added into the collection by Antoine Galland and other European translators.

The opening story of A Thousand and One Nights concerns a Persian king and his new bride. He is shocked to discover that his brother's wife is unfaithful; discovering his own wife's infidelity has been even more flagrant, he has her executed: but in his bitterness and grief decides that all women are the same. The king, Shahryar, begins to marry a succession of virgins only to execute each one the next morning, before she has a chance to dishonour him. Eventually the vizier, whose duty it is to provide them, cannot find any more virgins. Scheherazade, the vizier's daughter, offers herself as the next bride and her father reluctantly agrees. On the night of their marriage, Scheherazade begins to tell the king a tale, but does not end it. The king, curious about how the story ends, is thus forced to postpone her execution in order to hear the conclusion. The next night, as soon as she finishes the tale, she begins (and only begins) a new one, and the king, eager to hear the conclusion, postpones her execution once again. So it goes on for 1,001 nights.

The tales vary widely: they include historical tales, love stories, tragedies, comedies, poems, burlesques and various forms of erotica. Numerous stories depict jinns, ghouls, sorcerers, magicians, and legendary places, which are often intermingled with real people and geography, not always rationally.

So much for the history lesson. The important thing about the stories in The Thousand and One Nights is that if you are familiar with the concept of qabalistic partzufim, you'll quickly recognise that many of the stories are in fact qabalistic tales. Just like the deeply esoteric tales in the Zohar, but here

presented in a more public format, albeit still aimed at an intelligent and esoteric audience. In a manner, these stories might be seen in a similar light to the stories which make up *Le Morte de Arthur* (The Arthurian and Grail Legends, which are also Hermetic lore imported originally from the Middle East).

If the qabalistic stories in the *Zohar* are the deepest level of esoteric lore about the partzufim, and the stories in *The Thousand and One Nights* are an example of the middle level, there is one last level, the most popular and public. That is, that a large number of popular children's stories, such as those found in Grimm's *Faery Tales*, are in fact qabalistic partzufim lore disguised in children's stories, for 100s of years in Europe (originally). A couple of books have been written on this subject, and curiously enough, one on alchemical lore which appears in classic faery tales, written by a man of the name of Hitchcock. As it turns out Hitchcock didn't really understand alchemy very well, but the spirit of his thesis is accurate enough.

ESSAY FIFTY-NINE

Qabala 11

To continue my discussion of qabala I want to now take what I have said previously about the partzufim, and show how the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn has presented the core philosophy of the partzufim theory in its training system. This subject is of huge interest to anyone curious about the alchemical inner work, and where they might find some inspiration on the subject.

The importance of looking at the Golden Dawn view of this subject is that until that organisation's teachings become public knowledge, it might be safe to say no significant changes in Western (hermetic) qabala had occurred in 100s of years. Now a huge portion of present day understanding of qabala has grown directly out of the Golden Dawn qabala.

The first thing I want to do here is provide a bit of background for anyone who might not be familiar with the Golden Dawn system generally, and with the subject of the Golden Dawn altar diagrams specifically.

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn is like a school. Like a university, of sorts. It has a graded instruction, but it only teaches one subject - Western tradition mainstream magic (esoteric).

Each grade is like a class, or a year of study at university. Although a grade may take more or less than a year to complete its activities and study. The study system of the Order of the Golden Dawn is based on the qabalistic Tree of Life. Each sephiroth, and some other waypoints on the Tree, represents one grade in the study system.

Typically, when a new student enters study in the Golden Dawn, each grade begins with a group ceremony (ritual), where all the key concepts that will be taught to the student, or 'impressed' upon them, in the grade are acted-out in a symbolic drama. When we look at all the grade dramas together, in order, as an overview, they all are 'acts' in a larger drama, which is a story about an initiates journey from being a normal human, to gaining a state of spiritual illumination. This process is what is traditionally referred to as a 'mystery play'. It is a very old practice whose roots are buried in prehistory, and these mystery plays can be found in one form or other in almost every culture on the planet, and all through human history. In most cultures they are well known public institutions, but in the West they have been forced underground and have been preserved in secret for 2000 years.

The Order of the Golden Dawn was founded in 1888, by members of an older semi-esoteric 'school', called Freemasonry. When the Freemasons who designed the Order of the Golden Dawn were looking for a pattern on which to base the details of their new 'Order', they used the system they were most familiar with. Freemasonry. In this way the Order of the Golden Dawn ... as a ceremonial structure ... is part of what we might call the Masonic genre.

Freemasonry, in its most basic form, is a ritual system of three degrees ... plus a 'higher' degree. The three degrees are known as 'blue masonry', and its degrees are known as 'entered apprentice', 'fellow craft' and 'master mason'. The higher degree is known as red or capitular masonry, and is known as the Order of the Holy Royal Arch.

As part of the ritual of each masonic degree, the aspirant is shown a large painting with traditional masonic symbols on it, different for each degree, which illustrates the core story of the degree it is attributed to. Masons refer to these large paintings as 'tracing boards'.

In order to understand just what a tracing board is, we must be aware that Freemasonry is a system of ritual (and beliefs and behaviour), based on the biblical story of the building of Solomon's Temple. Each degree in the masonic system tells part of the story of stone mason's involvement in building the Temple, and activities revolving around the murder of the Master Mason who was the overseer of the entire operation. A tracing board is, therefore, like a blueprint that an architect creates, and builder's consult, for the process of building a structure. In other words, a tracing board is to a stone mason, the core plan of the work.

So the tracing board for each masonic degree tells the story of the core concepts taught in that degree.

Now ... the Freemasons who created the Order of the Golden Dawn liked this tracing board concept, so much, that they incorporated it into the Golden Dawn system too. But instead of calling these diagrams in Golden Dawn ceremonies 'tracing boards', they called them 'altar diagrams'. But, as any mason who has also been part of Golden Dawn ceremony will tell you, the concept is exactly the same as the tracing board system. The altar diagrams of the Golden Dawn grade ceremonies are symbolic diagrams of the essential plan of that grade, and together all of the altar diagrams tell a very specific story.

The important thing about the Golden Dawn altar diagrams is that they are all blatantly qabalistic. That is, they tell the core story of that which the qabala teaches - once it is stripped of all its religio-political garbage. That story is both initiatory, and it focuses sharply on how the partzufim are involved in the initiation process.

It is a curious fact that out of all the ceremonial iconography in the Golden Dawn system, these altar diagrams are probably

the least understood, studied and discussed. In all my years of involvement in the study of the Golden Dawn system, I have rarely heard anyone discuss the subject, and out of all the dozens of books published on the Golden Dawn system, I have never seen one that elaborates on the altar diagram story.

It is my firm belief, though, that the altar diagram system in the Golden Dawn was likely imported from some other, older, qabalistic 'school' ... quite possibly the famous German 'Gold und Rozenkrutzer Order'. I also believe that after all of the more obvious symbolism is stripped away from the Golden Dawn system, that the 'core' dynamic of the Golden Dawn initiation process is described in those diagrams.

So to complete my essays on the partzufim I am now going to present a series of essays on the GD altar diagrams. I have wanted to re-draw my own versions of these diagrams for years, and so this now gives me an excuse to do so here. Because it might take me some time to get each of these drawings completed, it is possible that between the altar diagram essays I might insert essays on some other subjects ... just to keep the ball rolling.

ESSAY SIXTY

Qabala 13 - Golden Dawn Altar Diagrams 2

The Golden Dawn Degree Plan

Again, just to add some more background to the GD altar diagram concept, I will here explain the overall plan in the GD system of how it structures its training system. In this way (for those not already familiar), you might have some conceptual framework upon which to superimpose the explanations I will be giving about the altar diagrams themselves.

I might add, before I go any further, in way of a caveat: that in discussing ideas associated with the Golden Dawn system, I do not intend in any way to be seen as endorsing The Golden Dawn as an entity. It needs to be clearly understood that I make reference to The Golden Dawn simply because I believe it is only polite to give credit where credit is due to the source of the basic concepts in these particular essays. It would simply be a little silly to try to divorce these concepts from the system they originate from in known history. In this way I recognise that while the GD obviously is wrought with problems, I also have a great deal of respect for what its creators tried to do, and for the ORIGINAL teaching and experience it provided in the scale of resouces available to us in modern mainstream occultism.

(See attached diagram)

As previously discussed, the GD grade system is based on the plan of the qabalistic Tree of Life. The GD as a whole was designed to represent everything mainstream about the Western Mystery Tradition. So it aimed at presenting itself as a combination of the esoteric teaching of the three primary cultures which came together to form the Western Tradition. The Egyptian, Judaic and Greek esoteric cultures.

The overall plan of the GD grade ceremonial takes place in a type of archetypal Temple setting, as if the candidate to the Mysteries was entering that Temple and being introduced to each of its symbolic attributes. The basis for this temple plan comes from the fundamental plan of the Egyptian temple (the oldest Western system). Egyptian temples were divided in to three sections. Just inside the main gate (pylon) was a large open courtyard, called the peristyle. It was surrounded on each side by a collonade of pillars. This courtyard was the only public area of the Temple. At the far end of the courtyard was a gate into a roofed hall called the hypostyle hall. This hall was filled with pillars, in an attempt at symbolically mimicing a forest of reeds. At the far side of the hypostyle another doorway led into the third section, the sanctuary, where we find a small room containing a raised enclosure which housed a statue of the temple God.

When Moses helped the captive Hebrews to escape their captivity in Egypt, and entered the wilderness to wonder for 40 years, Moses modeled the religious structure of this nomadic culture on the Egyptian mysteries. As we know from biblical sources Moses was raised by the Egyptian royal family. This meant that he was trained as an Egyptian initiate. As a place of worship, in the wilderness, Moses designed a portable temple which was really just a complex tent. Its basic structure was the same as an Egyptian temple. An outer courtyard in which the public could gather, and an inner section divided in to two rooms, with access to the Priests alone. These two rooms were called 'The Holy Place' and 'The Holy of Holies', the equivalent of the Egyptian sanctuary, where the presence of God dwelt. Eventually when Solomon built the first permanent Judaic temple in Jerusalem he based it on this same plan.

Because the GD is a qabalistic system, the story enacted in its grade ceremonial is most closely aligned with the Hebrew temple.

The ancient Greeks also followed a similar system. But true to Greek esoteric culture they either went their own way with the details, or they did not entirely understand the core teaching of Western esoteric teaching. For we shouldn't forget (as Paracelsus pointed out), that the Egyptians greatly resisted passing their deepest secrets on to the Greeks (when Egypt was conquered by them), and that a lack of the true depth of esoteric knowledge by the Greeks led them eventually to found the ground plan of philosophy which would become the basis for modern Western physical science.

The GD system being based on the Tree of Life is divided in too 10 basic 'degrees' of teaching and activity, with a couple of appended degrees. Each degree has a Latin title, and a symbollic number. So, for example, the first degree is called 'Neophyte', has the number 0=0, and is attributed to the public courtyard of the symbolic temple. It represents the aspirant standing before the gate to the inner temple. The next degree is called 'Zelator' (enthusiastic student), and is given the number 1=10. The next grade is called 'Theoricus' (student studying theory), is given the number 2=9, and so on.

The degrees up to 4=7 'Philosophus' are collectively known as the outer Order of the Golden Dawn. The degrees 5=6 to 7=4 are an inner Order known as the Order of the Red Rose and Cross of Gold. (RRetAC). Between the Outer Order and the Inner Order is a degree known as 'The Portal' degree.

In the original system of the GD there were only degrees up to 5=6 (Adeptus Minor). But later authorities in the Order created ceremonial and teaching for 6=5 (Adeptus Major) and 7=4 (Adeptus Exemptus) degrees. Attempts were also made to form a study system for the 'Third Order' (8=3 and 9=2), but those attempts were really not productive.

In looking at the altar diagrams we will be considering only the grades up to 5=6 (Adeptus Minor), since the altar diagram

system in the GD was designed to tell its entire story by the time the 5=6 diagram was witnessed by the aspirant.

ESSAY SIXTY-ONE

Qabala 14 - Golden Dawn Altar Diagrams 3

The Altar Diagram for Theoricus 2=9

As I pointed out previously the first Degree in the Golden Dawn (GD)

system of training is called Neophyte 0=0. Generally speaking there is

no altar diagram for that Degree.

The second Degree is Zelator 1=10, and the altar diagram for that

Degree is a picture of what is referred to as 'The Flaming Sword'. I

won't reproduce that altar diagram here because that symbol is

incorporated into the altar diagram for the 2=9 Degree of Theoricus,

which you will find attached.

If you look closely at the 2=9 altar diagram you will notice the hilt

of a sword poking up out of the first sephira (at the top of the diagram). If you follow to the second sephira you'll see part of the

blade of the sword, surrounded by flame, bridging the gap between

sephira 1 and 2. This theme continues down the spheres in order 3, 4,

5, 6, etc, right to the last sephira (10), where the tip of the blade

protrudes from the bottom of the tenth sphere.

This flaming sword forms a zig-zag pattern down the tree, and the image of this sword, minus everything else in this altar diagram, is the altar diagram for the previous 1=10 Degree. If you are completely new to qabala, and to the GD system of training, when you see the zig-zag flaming sword in the 1=10 Degree you might not realise that zig-zag pattern is forming the basis for the pattern of the qabalistic Tree of Life. But as soon as you advance to 2=9 and see the altar diagram there, you can now see that this flaming sword traces out the geometric positions of the ten sephiroth of the Tree of Life.

The explanation of the symbol of the flaming sword goes something like this: It represents the descent of divine influence, from the highest level of existence, down to the physical world. In other words, it symbolises the 'link' between the divine and the physical, through which the divine governs and influences the physical. Like a flaming sword that divine influence is powerful and uncontested. In some qabalistic stories this symbol is also referred to as the path of 'The Lightning Bolt'. Which adds to the image of its uncontested power, and its descent from above to below.

The symbol of the flaming sword is taken directly from a passage in the Bible, Genesis 3.24: where we are told:

"... at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life"

Eden, for hermetic qabalists, is the symbol for the part of reality where divine truth (the ancient mysteries) abide. The Tree of Life in the garden of Eden is a symbol of both the mystery teachings, and the practical method of initiation. The flaming sword is therefore the 'thing' which guards entrance into the sacred mysteries (the attainment of spiritual Illumination). So what in fact is it that guards this gateway? It is the influence that the divine has over physical things. In other words, something spiritual, which controls physical reality, chooses who can enter-in to the garden of Eden (the Temple of the Ancient Mysteries), and partake of the Tree of Life.

The basic story which is told in the GD ceremony of the first Degree (1=10) concerns itself with what is involved in the task of entering that Temple. So the first thing the candidate to the Mysteries learns, is that the Gateway is guarded.

These ideas, all of which are graphically represented in the Altar diagram for the 1=10 Degree, speak clearly of one essential concept, that the journey through the GD ceremonial grades is an initiatory journey.

When we reach the 2=9 Degree, and see the altar diagram I have attached to this essay, this concept is now elaborated upon. The first idea that we are required to grasp is that this initiatory journey has a kind of road map, and we now can see that road map in the 2=9 altar diagram. That is, that the qabalistic Tree of Life is a blueprint of the initiatory journey. As that journey unfolds, in each new Degree ceremony we participate in, we recognise that the core of these ceremonies is a sacred drama which walks the candidate symbolically from one sephira to the next, along each pathway that links the sephiroth.

The flaming sword symbol on this qabalistic road map is telling us that this entire journey is orchestrated from 'above' to 'below', as divine influence descends upon the candidate drawing him or her onward and upward through the various levels of the initiatory experience.

Next to the symbol of the flaming sword there is a second prominent symbol in the 2=9 altar diagram, which hermetic qabalists refer to as 'The Serpent of Wisdom'. This serpent has its tail in the lowest and tenth sephira, and its body winds up the tree touching each 'path' (between the sephiroth) in their numeric order, until, at the summit of the Tree the serpent's head curves around the first sephira and terminates above the last path.

This is a complex symbol. As the flaming sword represents the candidate's journey through each grade-sephira, tracing up the zig-zag pattern, the serpent symbol represents each pathway (experience) that must be had by the candidate in order to travel from one sephira to the next. This is why this serpent is called the serpent of wisdom, because as the candidate travels each symbolic path, accumulating initiatory experience, he or she increases in divine wisdom.

It should also be understood that there are two approaches to the initiatory journey. One is represented by the long winding and difficult path of the serpent, which represents the long journey taken through many lives to reach that final life where the final initiation

will complete the need to physically incarnate. The second approach is represented by the flaming sword, and as I mentioned previously, is called by advanced initiates 'The Lightning Path'. This approach to initiation is the one taken by individuals who are ready for their final journey and therefore have accumulated enough relevant previous experience to complete the journey in one lifetime. Because of this there is no need to retrace the long path, but a quick ascent up the Tree, governed completely by divine intervention, is open to that candidate.

In this way, the altar diagram in the 2=9 Degree is laying the ground plan for hermetic initiation, for the benefit of the candidate. The basic understanding of the entire complex plan of the GD initiation is to be seen in the 2=9 altar diagram. Symbolically, though, this same journey is made by anyone being properly trained in any initiatory system.

From this point on new symbols, largely focusing on the roles which the partzufim play in the initiatory process, are over-laid on the Tree symbol, in order to elaborate on the details of the journey.

ESSAY SIXTY-TWO

Qabala 15 - Golden Dawn Altar Diagrams 4

The Altar Diagram for Practicus 3=8

So this is where the GD altar diagrams now become interesting, for me.

In the previous Degree we were introduced to a diagram that told us what the basic format of the qabalistic Tree of Life (ToL) looks like. In the Degrees 3=8 and 4=7 we are presented with two altar diagrams which present the theme of the Garden of Eden. The diagram we are looking at in this essay is that of 3=8 titled "The Garden of Eden Before the Fall". (See attachment).

The 'Eden' diagrams are the heart of the esoteric teaching hidden behind the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden. From these diagrams, and the teachings they represent, we learn the secret knowledge the old qabalists had about the 'structure' and 'function' of the mind. In other words, these Eden diagrams are maps, in a manner, of esoteric psychology.

The central symbols of the Eden story are the primary archetypes of the mind. We can see these archetypes (partzufim) arranged in a hierarchy down the central axis of the Eden diagram. At the very bottom of the diagram we see (1) the Nachash, or serpent of evil, coiled around a set of seven spheres. (2) Above Nachash we see Nephesch, a female figure, standing with her feet in Malkuth (the physical world), and her 'head' in Yesod (the lower astral universe, or unconscious mind). (3) Just above Nephesch we see Ruach. His feet in Yesod (the unconscious is his support), and his head in Tiphareth (the conscious mind). Then (4) the Neschamah, a winged angelic like figure standing on Daath (her foundation is specialised 'knowledge'), and her head in Chockmah (the starry

Crown on her head, representing the zodiac which is the astrological attribute of Chockmah).

This diagram as a whole represents the state of the human mind before it 'falls' in to physical existence. This means 'historically', before humanity first incarnated at the start of our primate evolution, and individually, before we each incarnate in a new life. As a whole this diagram is a symbol of the harmony and balance that exists in the mind before it is immersed in binary reality, and becomes subject to the conflict that is the character of binary reality.

In this state the evil serpent is maintained at the deepest part of the unconscious, where it cannot interfere with the harmonious function of the other partzufim. The Nephesch (unconscious mind), is founded in this serpent function. She stands arms outstretched supporting the twin forces of binary reality, maintaining their bases in balance, so that one pole of the binary never has precedence over the other. These two binary poles are represented by the left and right pillars she supports.

Behind Nephesch and Ruach is a red Tree. This is the infamous 'Tree of Life' (and so bares the colour of Fire). Nephesch is the ground-bed of this tree, and Ruach stands sacrificed on it. That is, his whole nature is dedicated toward LIFE. His arms stretch out to the sephiroth Geburah (SEVERITY) and Chesed (MERCY), and he holds these two binary forces in equal balance.

Behind the red Tree of Life is a cross of the Elements, representing the four rivers that are said to 'go out of Eden' (coloured red (Fire), blue (Water), yellow (Air) and black (Earth)), and the spirit (the upper white portion of the cross), which represents the Quintessence.

Standing over the Quintessence portion of the cross is Neschamah. She of course represents the Quintessence in humanity, its eternal Higher Functions all rolled in to one.

Neschamah is ... 'clothed in the Sun, and stands upon the moon' ... (a quote from the book of Revelations). This symbolises the fact that the Higher Functions, which are 'Present' in the Neschamah, are clothed in the Ruach (Sun), and have their root in the Nephesh (Moon). Neschamah is also surrounded by a rainbow, which not only is an important alchemical symbol, but represents 'hope' in Biblical symbolism. A sign in the 'heavens' of great things to come.

At the base of the Eden diagram we see a tree growing out of Malkuth (the physical world). This is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. In its foliage we see two sets of astrological symbols of the seven planets. These are the 'fruits' of the Tree of Knowledge ... the seven virtues and the seven vices. The fruit that the Nephesh (unconscious) convinced the Ruach (the conscious rational mind) to 'eat'.

This diagram can, therefore, be looked at as a diagram of the basic machinery of the mind. The 'key' to the esoteric story of the Genesis of humanity.

It is also the ground plan of the Golden Dawn ritual-Degree system. The psychological mechanics of Golden Dawn Degree ritual is found here in this diagram spelled out clearly.

It is my personal belief that McGregor Mathers (who was the individual primarily responsible for building up and fleshing out the structure, poetry of and philosophy behind the Golden Dawn Degree system), did not himself design the 3=8 and 4=7 altar diagrams. I believe that Mathers was given, or found, the 3=8 diagram and the 4=7 diagram from some other older source (possibly the Order of the Gold and Rosicrucians, where remnants of this qabalistic system can be found in a book

published by one of its Adepts, the alchemist Johanne Helmond), and that these two diagrams became the basis from which Mathers then designed the previous 2=9 and the later 5=6 diagrams. In order to flesh-out the altar diagram system.

Whoever did design the 3=8 and 4=7 diagrams was indeed a Master qabalist, because he not only was deeply familiar with the entire essential qabalistic scheme, but he also understood it was essentially a scheme describing esoteric psychology rooted in hermetic alchemy, plus he had the skill to pull together all that hermetic thought in to two beautiful symbolic diagrams.

The importance of this diagram to an alchemist is that through its understanding, he can not only use this diagram as a reference point (and conceptual model) for how his own mind is structured, but also for how the 'matter' in his flasks is organised. In this way this diagram (and the one following it), unite the hermetic philosophies of mind (magic) and matter (alchemy) into one perfect system.

It is also important to understand that this 3=8 diagram represents the state of an hermetic Adept's mind. No Illuminated, but in harmony and governed by the Neschamah (Understanding).

I believe this 3=8 diagram, the 4=7 diagram and the 5=6 diagram are the most important esoteric diagrams in all of hermetism. Because together they explain exactly and entire overview of the road to Illumination - and the role alchemy and magic play in that journey.

ESSAY SIXTY-THREE

Qabala 16 - Golden Dawn Altar Diagrams 5

The Altar Diagram for Philosophus 4=7

Ok, so this was a long time coming. My essay of the altar diagram for the 4=7 grade of Philosophus. You might remember that the previous altar diagram (3=8 grade Practicus) was titled 'The Garden of Eden Before the Fall'. That diagram is a very cunningly crafted symbolic representation of part of the garden of Eden story out of the old Testament. Now this next diagram is titled 'The Garden of Eden After the Fall' ... and is the continuation of that story.

Of all five of the primary altar diagrams this is my favorite because it describes perfectly the condition of the mind of the average human living his or her daily life of this planet. Remembering that while both of the 'Eden' diagrams are symbolic representations of the Eden story in Genesis, qabalistically they are actually diagrams which represent the esoteric dynamic of the human psyche. (the accuracy of which is quite surprising considering the era in which the GD used these diagrams).

So let's start by working our way through the various symbols in this diagram.

First, you'll notice once again that the foundation of the glyph is the Tree of Life structure, which we can recognise from the spheres or sephiroth positioned in the traditional form (but without the paths joining them). The next idea to be aware of is that there are obviously similarities with the previous (3=8) diagram. We can see nephesch at the bottom, above her is ruach, and right at the top we can see the partzufim of the supernal triad (higher functions), clustered together. We also

see nachash, the many headed red serpent-dragon of evil. But also obviously these partzufim are in different positions than they had in the previous diagram.

Nachash is no longer coiled neatly beneath the lowest sephiroth (Malkuth). He is now uncoiled and his heads extend each to one of the lower sephiroth, all the way up to Daath (the white sephira representing 'knowledge'). What this represents is that the serpent force, the nachash, the maintainer of the binary condition of physical reality, now has control over all of the lower functions (primarily that means nephesch and ruach, our our common human self). We see this influence in the fact that nephesch has now sunk down below Malkuth, into 'The Seven Palaces of the qliphoth' (the source of the nachash). She also no longer supports the pillars of Mercy and Severity, which support previously rooted the Tree in balance. Now those pillars are gone, and her focus is below. This creates imbalance in the lower functions.

Similarly ruach too has fallen. He no longer is centred in Tiphareth, but is now greatly influenced by Yesod (the unconscious), forcing him to be ruled by habitual behaviour and the lower passions.

But the influence of the serpent does not reach above Daath. That is, the serpent nachash can only affect the lower functions. Not the higher functions. There is a Biblical reference which explains this situation ...

"So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." (Genesis 3:24)

In other words, when humanity (ruach and nephesch) fell into physical reality, the Supreme Being closed the Gate to Eden, and withdraw the Path of the Flaming Sword (the symbol of the path of ascent back to Spiritual Illumination, which we

saw in the first altar diagram). This withdrawing of the Flaming sword back into the Supernals (Eden) is symbolic of the concept that the process of initiation, which allows us to return to Illumination, is no longer readily available. It is now 'occult' (hidden), and is only made available to individuals who have completed their cycle of incarnations ... that is, "knowledge of the tree of good and evil". The flaming sword, or path of return, was withdrawn in order to ... "keep the way of the Tree of Life" ... that is, to preserve the process of initiation from being corrupted by the influence of the nachash. So it will always be available in good condition, when needed. Protected by the Higher Functions.

The four cherubim that also guard the Gate to Eden are the four Primary Partzufim, each of which performs a function in maintaining every day life as well as contributing to the path of return.

Above Daath, which is the Gate to Eden itself, we see the three supernal sephiroth bunched together into a large sphere. Neschamah, on the left, has her head turned away from the lower functions. This is because the 'conscious' link between the lower and the higher functions in the average person is now severed.

Next to neschamah, on her right, we see chiah, more-or-less hidden behind neschamah. Above them both the crown symbol obviously represents Kether and the yechidah ... the Higher Genius.

For the alchemist who desires to enter the sacred garden of Hesperides, the Garden of the Philosophers, and the Eden of the qabalists, the enigma of Daath (knowledge) must be solved. When this happens the way on to the Lightning Path (represented by the flaming sword) once again opens up to him, and the journey of initiation, toward Illumination, can once again begin.

When that journey is resumed, slowly, on-by-one, each of the serpent's heads withdraws from the lower sephiroth, and recoils back below Malkuth, no longer poisoning ruach and nephesch with attraction to binary illusion.

The early stage of the initiatory process acquaints the initiate intimately with the entire dynamic shown in this diagram. The initiate literally interacts with nephesch and ruach, seeing as he or she does, how they are ruled over by the serpent force, and how that affects the every day functioning of nephesch (feeling) and ruach (thinking).

For the alchemist this process graphically and symbolically represents the separation of the prime matter, into its Elements, and the purification of those Elements by removing the Caput Mortem (death's head, or nachash), from the matter of the Stone. As each step of manipulating and purifying the matter unfolds in the Great Work, and the heads of the serpent of evil are retracted, the matter loses its attraction to antipathy (division), and starts its chemical journey back toward unity (the Stone).

ESSAY SIXTY-FOUR

Qabala 17 - GD Altar Diagrams 6

The Vault of the Adepti

Ok, finally the last of my GD Altar diagram essays.

Just to recap, we saw the first altar diagram of the 2=9 Grade, a simple depiction of the Tree of Life. In 3=8 we saw the diagram called 'The Garden of Eden Before the Fall'. In 4=7 we saw the diagram called 'The Garden of Eden After the Fall'. There actually are two pseudo altar diagrams in the next degree (called 'Portal'), but they are quite obviously not part of the original scheme, and we added later probably by Mathers.

Next, then, we find the most complex altar diagram in the 5=6 grade called 'Adeptus Minor' (Lesser Adept).

The main focus of the 5=6 degree rite is what is referred to as 'the vault of the adepti'. This is a symbolic representation of the sepulchre of the mythic founder of the Rosicrucian Fraternity. The mythology of the Rosicrucian foundation tells us that the founder of the Fraternity (Christian Rosencruetz), when he died, was buried in a sarcophagus in a secret room behind the wall at the back of the hall in which the Brotherhood met. This sepulchre was a seven sided room and the sarcophagus was laid out in the centre of the floor with a circular altar imposed over it.

During the 5=6 rite the candidate is invited to rediscover this vault, symbolically, and a model representation of it is set up in the ritual temple. The inside of the GD version of this vault is one large and very complex symbol, designed to represent the entire esoteric nature of the universe. I am not going to discuss

the entire symbolism of the vault, but only the parts which directly are related to this altar diagram theme.

(See attached picture).

In the attached diagram you can see two of the vault symbols. At the bottom of the diagram there is a heptagram. This shows what is painted on the floor of the vault. The seven sides of the heptagram are where you would see the seven walls of the vault. This floor diagram shows, in a slightly different form, the same symbol we see at the bottom of the 3=8 altar diagram (Eden before the fall), where nephesch stands on and above the 'abode of the qliploth' (the powers of the Nachash or Serpent of Evil). So the entire floor of the vault represents the powers of the nachash. Therefore, as the Adept enters the vault, and walks on this floor diagram, like nephesch in the 3=8 diagram he is symbolically re-affirming that he has conquered the powers of the nachash, and so now treads them under his feet (as it were). In this way we might say that this floor symbol, and the act of walking over it, represents more than anything what state the real Adept is in, internally. Of course this symbolic act and the reality in the modern adept are most often not in harmony.

Above the symbol of the floor of the vault I have drawn what is known as 'the lid of the pastos'. The pastos being the sarchophagus in which Christian Rosencruetz is symbolically buried. In the symbolism of the 5=6 rite Christian Rosencruetz therefore represents the candidate's higher genius. His higher genius being 'dead' and 'buried' in the 'vault' of the physical universe. In other words, the body in the pastos is a symbol of the higher genius incarnate as a living human. Living here, but dead to the higher reality.

The lid of the pastos now describes, in abridged form, the whole journey of the higher genius in its act of becoming

incarnate, living many lives, and then being initiated and released again back to the higher life.

At the bottom half of the lid of the pastos we see an image of 'the Christos' crucified, and ensnared in the coils of the dragon nachash. The Christos is of course a symbol for the higher genius. By being crucified we understand the higher genius is 'nailed' to a cross representing the four Elements of the physical universe. In other words, the higher genius is incarnate. As soon as this happens the nachash takes over the functions of the higher genius, thereby making the 'higher functions' in to 'the lower functions'. So this lower half of the lid of the pastos is a different and more simple way of representing the 4=7 diagram 'The Garden of Eden After the Fall'. The Fall from the Garden of Eden being the Old Testament way of presenting the act of incarnation, qabalistically. The crucifixion of the Christos being the New Testament way of representing that same concept.

On the top half of the lid of the pastos we see the other end of the scale. Here we see the higher genius ressurected (Illuminated). This image is taken from the Book of Revelations. It shows the higher genius iterally as 'The Flaming Sword' (which we understand as meaning ... the path to spiritual emancipation). At specific points on this flaming sword we see lamps, representing the light (Wisdom) that the Sephiroth of the Tree of Life gift to the initiate. The higher genius also holds seven stars in his right hand, representing the seven primary powers of the Yechidah. He also holds the Book of Life in his left hand ... which is the anima mundi (the record and plan of life).

So together the bottom and top halves of the lid of the pastos represent the journey of the initiate, culminating in Spiritual Illumination ... the pre-requisite for which is the 'treading of the Dragon under foot' (mastering the nachash). That is ... nobody can rightly claim to be Adept until the

nachash is under control, and the psyche is returned to a near-close condition as represented in the 3=8 diagra, of Eden Before the Fall.

ESSAY SIXTY-FIVE

july 2014 - upcoming essays notice

Hi everyone,

We've had a number of people join the forum since my last update, and a number in the last couple of weeks. So I thought I would throw in a quick update for everyone's benefit, and to help the newbies to catch up.

Firstly, Oroborus I haven't overlooked the pic you asked for of the sooty residue. Hopefully I'll have that for you tonight.

John, I'm just about to reply to your questions about magical evocation.

With the present essays on the GD altar diagrams, we have maybe six essays on that subject to go. Then I will be flipping back to lab alchemy.

We have a few people who have joined us recently who are considering taking up lab alchemy, or extending on their previous lab experience. So as soon as I have completed the GD altar diagram lectures I'm going to talk in some detail (probably 2 essays) on the lab training I (we) offer. What it involves, our lab training philosophy, and what we consider when looking at new student applications.

Immediately following that I would like to devote maybe 1 or 2 essays on an update on the Hollandus plant work research that is going on behind the scenes. Lots of pretty photos and a bunch of very curious information on that process.

After that lab work catch up I would like to devote a couple of essays (at least) to the alchemical view of the Tarot. A lot of

that will have to do with my previous research in preparation for designing my own deck. So lots of 'behind the scenes' info there.

After the Tarot essays I want to flip back to lab, and select a text on the acetate path to pick apart, and explain. So if you have a text you particularly want some insight on, let me know, and I'll consider it as the basis for those essays. This will give you all a look at how I dissect a text from the classic or ancient eras in order to assess its value, and to pull out of it as much help as I can.

After that I would like to give, essentially, a break down of my third book manuscript. A lot of you have asked about that book, and because it has taken an unacceptably long time to get published, if it is not published by the time I get to this series of essays, you're pretty much gonna get the whole Monty here ... complete with a bunch of revolutionary alchemical knowledge.

Somewhere in the middle of all that I'm going to randomly throw in a bunch of interesting graphics. Mostly diagrams, and some explanations, that I have produced over the years.

Lastly ... for general notice ... I am about to compile and upload the second zip file of lectures and graphics following the last zip. This will help anyone who missed the lectures after the last zip, and needs the graphics in particular. I will also update that 1st zip with the bits that were missing.

Any questions or requests?

kindest

ESSAY SIXTY-SIX

Random Essay - 2 - The Q-state and 'Medicine'

The question of how alchemical products function as medicines has been raised more than once. The question of how this aspect of alchemy operates is an important consideration, because it is a mechanism that is not well discussed anywhere in classic alchemic literature (outside of Paracelsus), and because a lot of misunderstanding is had about this subject, which is perpetuated unquestioningly, and this mistakes taken for granted.

So when considering the medicinal value of alchemical products, three issues need to be looked at:

- (1) Defining what alchemy is
- (2) Understanding what a Q-state is
- (3) Understanding the effect of ingesting Q-state material

So let's look at each of these in turn.

I begin by defining alchemy primarily as a verb ... a word labeling an action. When we say "I am doing alchemy" ... by this we mean we are applying a specific process. It is acceptable to use the term alchemy as a noun (naming word), in a broad and general way ... such as "I studied the history of alchemy" ... and mean by that the study of a lot of things which also have come under the banner of alchemical tradition, but which technically are not alchemy. But strictly and technically speaking, alchemy refers to a very specific process, based on a specific formula. This process and its formula can be applied to music, politics, relationships, architecture, etc., and of course to chemistry.

I won't re-cover the details of this process and its formula. That should already by now be well understood. But what we need to grasp is that if we apply the alchemical formula to ... music, politics, psychology, etc., ... the result will always be the same. The process will take the 'thing' in its present crude state and evolve it ... and the end of that process will always be the the Q-state of that thing. (As long as you are working the alchemical process accurately, on that thing).

This is a deeply important concept. Knowing that (1) alchemy is a process, (2) that process is universal (and therefore can be applied to anything), and (3) the end of that process is always a Q-state of the subject being worked on.

When I say 'the end of the process' I specifically mean ... the production of indigestible substances (when talking about lab alchemy). Alchemists produce all kinds of curious things that are not Q-state materials. Interesting salts, solvents, oils, etc., etc., but as long as the alchemical process is being worked, these non-Q-state products are products of an incomplete process. They are side-products. Parts of the overall, complete, alchemical process. In that way they are a part of alchemy, but are not themselves, necessarily, alchemical.

Anyone who disagrees that the conclusion of the deliberate manipulation of a thing alchemically is not always a Q-state, simply doesn't understand alchemy.

If this definition of alchemy is (technically) accurate, then we can say: the purpose in alchemy (applying the alchemical process), is to achieve Q-states.

Now, in order to know what that statement means we need to know what a Q-state is.

The simplest definition of Q-state (quintessence), is that it is a 'unitary' substance (or condition), composed of an homogeneous wedding of the three properly prepared Principals of a thing.

That is ... a Q-state must be composed of the Intelligence (mind), Energy system and Structure native to the original thing being processed. These Principals must be properly prepared. That is, they must have the 'gross matter' which has adhered to them through binary existence, removed.

The diagram I have attached to this email hopefully describes this idea in more detail.

First, at the top of the diagram, we have the universal Q-state. This is like the ultimate plan of what a Q-state in individual systems must be. How it must be constructed. So the universal Q-state contains the rules for Q-state existence. The way these universal rules are enforced is that an individualised Q-state can't exist without its root being extracted from the universal Q-state. So, for example, the Q-state of the species 'Pig' can't exist without it having first been extracted out of the universal Q-state. So a tiny piece of the universal Q-state is extracted, and that piece contains a copy of the rules for Q-states, and then a 'tweak' is made to that extracted Q-state portion, which allows the blueprint inside the Q-state to produce 'Pig'.

I won't go in to how that tweak occurs, because it is complex. But I will say it is effected by the process of mutation, in nature, which comes in to effect at the bottom of the pyramid.

So now we have a non-physical Q-state portion that is the data-base containing the instructions for producing a psycho-physical pig.

Now, whenever pig's enter in to sexual reproduction, as soon as an egg is fertilised, the Q-state is the thing which

pumps information in to the developing organic vehicle, as well as the developing mind and energy system of the foetus, telling the fetal pig how to evolve.

What this tells us is that the Q-state totally governs the pig's existence. It contains all the 'pig rules' for mind, energy and body ... the entire pig's existence (especially since the mind-Principal also governs the outer environment).

The diagram I have attached should be largely self explanatory. We see the 'origin' Q-state as the universal rule at the top. Then when considering a specific species ... a diamond, a cat, a cabbage plant, etc., ... I find it easiest to visualise the species, and individual's existence as a pyramid. At the top we have the species/individual's personal Q-state ... it is like the cap of the pyramid. It contains all the specie's/individual's information (blueprint). This Q-state 'in a manner' exists outside of physical reality, in a place that is not limited by physical time or space. I say 'in a manner' because truly only the intelligence Principal of the Q-state is non-physical. The energy and structure are physical. But until the individual in the species is conceived (sexually) the structure and a part of the energy are not as yet 'determined' to the individual, but are still part of the universal.

Once the foetus is unfolding, it is at the point of the pyramid just under the cap. It is still 'simple' (uncomplex) and close to unity. But as the pig individual grows up, lives, experiences and interacts with its environment, it slowly becomes more and more complex. The bottom of our pyramid represents the complexity of a fully mature pig.

At a certain stage in the pig-life it hits full maturity. 'Mid-life'. This stage is represented by the bottom of the pyramid. Once that 'full-saturation' of pig-nature is reached, a curious thing happens. The pig organism cannot continue to function as a nicely integrated complete pig-individual. The 'rules' for pig-life

in the pig Q-state are now so stretched, so far extended from their source, that faults in the 'living' rules start to occur. Cells do not divide effectively, always. Immunity breaks down, etc. Mistakes in DNA reproduction occur. First on tiny scale, then later affecting the healthy function of entire organs.

This condition degrades the organism, and eventually causes death. This is nature's way of saying ... "ok, this is as far as it is safe for you to grow, at this time. So time to stop, and return to the start-point". But each successive life cycle in the pig-kingdom adds a tiny bit more information to the Q-state, which enables the Q-state to extend its effect, and for pigs to live longer and more healthily, as the Q-state learns to adapt to physical conditions more.

The moment death sets in, the complex and now dysfunctioning organism starts to decompose. This decomposition is a process in nature that now takes what started as a simple set of rules (the Q-state), and developed those rules in to a complex living organism, and breaks down that complexity and returns it to its original simplicity (the Q-state ground-bed). This is an important concept for lab alchemists to grasp.

In this way everything the pig had become is now recycled ... the pig body, the pig mind and the pig energy. It all returns to the pig-species (race) collective.

Ok, so that is what a Q-state is (roughly speaking). Now let's look at how all of that translates into 'alchemical remedy'.

So let us say we are going to make a pig 'remedy', alchemically. That is, we are going to take a dead pig, and turn it in to a pig quintessence. Ideally we kill the pig in vitro (in a closed distillation system). We carry out the various alchemical processes on the dead pig, and at the end we produce our pig-medicine (quintessence).

The Q-state we now have, of that pig, is EXACTLY what nature herself makes of the pig, once it has died and decomposed, naturally. BUT, instead of the 'pig-stuff' returning to the pig-collective ... we have carefully isolated its body, mind and energy system, in our lab. Stopping these Principals from being blown to the four directions, of the pig-collective. This means that OUR pig Q-state is localised. We have all the bits together ... and in our little pig-stone, or pig-elixir, we have a hardware edition of the pig Q-state, which taps directly in to the collective pig-mind and pig-energy field.

Think of this pig-stone as being like a laptop hooked up to the internet. The physical stone is like the physical laptop. But this laptop cannot just access any part of the web. It contains a special piece of software that only allows the user to access information on the web that is connected to 'pigs'. So, its like only being able to do Goggle searches that are hyphenated pig-<something>.

Now. let's say we have a pet pig in our backyard, and we are going to slip some pig-Q-state in to is drinking water. What effect will that have? It is simple ... it will be like ... instead of the natural state where our pet pig's Q-state operates from the top-down ... we are now slipping in the pig-Q-state at the bottom of the pyramid. So the part of the pet-pig pyramid of existence which is normally the furthestmost from the pig-rules origin, is now directly hooked in to that pig-rules state. The bottom of the pig-pyramid is now not more-or-less-divorced from pure pig-rule government, it is intimately hooked in to that pure instruction.

So this will immediately cause any 'dysfunction' in the pig-life that has crept-in because of its relative division from the rule-source, to be powerfully corrected, to re-conform to the pure pig-rules in the Q-state. Thus ... 'rejuvenation' ... fully, for our pet pig.

Now, let's consider what would happen if our pet pig had, let's say, liver disease ... and we fed it our pig-Q-state to cure the liver disease. So, yeah, the liver disease will be cured ... because the Q-state is designed to return our pig back to perfect pig-state. BUT ... it won't target the liver problem alone. The Q-state will still effect the entire pig-life. So there are 'side-effects' if you like ... where the overall effect of the ingestion will likely totally overwhelm the liver-cure. Aka, you get more than you bargained for.

Now let's look at another scenario. Let's say YOU decide to ingest your pig-Q-state. What would happen? Well, you are basically ingesting in to yourself the rules for pig-life. To a certain degree this is kinda safe, because 'ideally' homo sapiens are the summit of this planet's biological life, so 'esoterically' we contain in us the basic systems for every other life-condition on the planet. That is, homo sapiens Q-state is built up, over millions of years of evolution, from all proceeding life-forms. So in a way the pig-Q-state is a sub-system of the human Q-state.

So when we ingest the pig-Q-state it won't affect all of our life, because homo sapiens Q-state is more advanced, so there are things in being human that the pig-Q-state won't have information for.

Now let us take that scenario, and think ... ok so what if I ingest a Melissa Officianalis Q-state? Well, we have plant mechanisms in us, so our Q-state is partially composed of plant rules. So the Melissa Q-state will affect us ONLY as far as plant Q-states can affect us. Then, that Melissa Q-state (as a species specific Q-state), is going to contain 'info' tweaks specific to Melissa. So the effect on us medicinally won't be totally plant-general, but will have a twist to it, specific to Melissa. BUT ... the plant specific 'rules' are so all-encompassing in plant Q-states, that the general plant effect almost over rules the specific plant species affect. Lines get blurred and general

effects stand forward, once we draw back from specific-complexity and move closer to general-simplicity.

In this way, common plant remedies (non-alchemical) exist in a state closer to the bottom of the pyramid, where things are more specific and complicated. So they are aimed at curing specific dis-eases, and more physical problems than non-physical problems. Whereas alchemical remedies being at the top of the pyramid are aimed at more general issues, of a more non-physical nature ... and therefore have more power in spiritual effect than physical effect (in a manner of speaking). This is why alchemy is a spiritual discipline, and alchemical remedies are 'initiatic', not pharmaceutical.

(As a side note: to the email reply which prompted this essay, PERFECTION is not found entirely in the Q-state. The ENTIRE system is an expression of the Q-state blueprint, in time and space.)

ESSAY SIXTY-SEVEN

Random Essay - 3a - 'Defining The Elements and The Principals'

"The Albertus Version"

It came to my mind the other day that the fundamental difference between the average occultist (and especially the 'magician'), and the alchemist, is that the magician tends to approach occultism as if the rules of the game are set, and all he has to do to gain success is follow them ... and the alchemist essentially looks at his task as a puzzle that has to be solved.

For this reason, essentially, I believe if anyone is going to clean up the act of Hermetic Knowledge, then that someone is more likely to be an alchemist.

For me, in all the years I have studied hermetism, and alchemy in particular, the subject of the correct understanding of the nature of the Elements and the Principals (and as a side note here, also the seven traditional planets), has begun with a belief that the generally accepted rules for the attributes given to these concepts are not quite kosher. I have always felt as if there is a body of understanding beneath the surface of popular opinion about the nature of the Elements and Principals that had a potential to transform our understanding of occultism generally, and of alchemy specifically. That something is not right in the popular view, and that this needs to be sorted out.

If you think about it, all of the various aspects of hermetic discipline ... astrology, divination, ritual, magic, alchemy, etc ... all rest on a foundation of the ideas about what the Elements and Principals truly are. If our view of these things is not accurate, the entire edifice built upon that foundation is weak.

Ok, so over the years I have played around with various arrangements of Elements and Principals to partzufim and other alchemical and hermetic concepts. The present system I use is not yet a finished work, I think, but it is a set of attributes that does a lot for uniting the various systems, neatly, of which these concepts form the foundation. Even though aspects of the system of attributes I use are not yet completely tidy, seeing how I look at these ideas might nevertheless lend some inspiration which might not have otherwise occurred to some of you.

So, firstly, let us look at the hard facts, beginning with Albertus' view.

For most people studying alchemy today, like it or not, many of the foundation ideas we have about how to approach the subject came from Frater Albertus. Before Frater Albertus made serious lab alchemy a publicly recognised discipline, starting in the early 60's, virtually everything that was known about alchemy was either well hidden in rare and elite underground circles, or was a bunch of popular ideas which were mostly complete rubbish.

Whenever we see ideas like "I'm working on the seven simples" ... or ... "the acetate path" ... and ideas like attributing plant properties to the 7 planets, or using various ways of calculating the best timing for alchemical processes ... most of these concepts were rooted into the beginning of the modern alchemical mind by Frater Albertus. He may not have been the originator of all these ideas, but he certainly played a major role in making them 'popular'.

Frater Albertus taught his alchemical system in 7 sets of information. One set per year, during a workshop that lasted about 2 or 3 weeks each year. Each year's teaching formed the foundation of the information which was taught in the following years. In the first year course he taught the 'plant work', and the

basic ideas he taught in that first year became the foundation concepts for everything that followed.

For brevity sake, Albertus' system of alchemical concepts (such as what the Principals and Elements are), is rooted in his version of the 'plant work'. His system of the plant work went something like this ...

(1) A herb was pulped and digested in an ethanol/water solvent.

(2) When a good tincture had been extracted, the herb was separated from the solution by filtration.

(3) The separated plant matter was dried and burned to ash, this ash was exposed to high heat in order to turn as much of the ash to a white state as possible. This he called the 'Vegetable Salt Principal'.

(4) The solution of water, ethanol and extracted plant resins was distilled, in order to separate out (a) the ethanol, (b) the water, and (c) the resins.

(5) The resins were dried and calcined down to a salt, and this salt was called the 'Vegetable Salt of Sulphur'

(6) The water was discarded.

(7) The ethanol was distilled several times in order to rectify it. This ethanol was called the 'Vegetable Mercury'. This ethanol was also bound to the 'Vegetable Volatile Sulphur', the two things not being easily separated.

(8) The 'pieces' collected were then joined together ... Salt Body, Salt of Sulphur, Ethanol with Volatile Sulphur.

There is a little variation to this basic process, where the Volatile Sulphur can be distilled out of the herb right at the start, via steam distillation. This allows us to collect the Volatile Sulphur without it binding to the ethanol later in the resin extraction stage. But for our purposes here, which method is used isn't important. What is important is how Albertus obtains the alchemical 'pieces' of the plant, and how he labels these pieces.

If we look at the attached diagram, we can see a systematic depiction of Albertus' alchemical anatomy of matter (specifically, plant matter).

In a manner, the plant pulp placed into the water/ethanol solution to digest, is Albertus' 'chaos' ... a state where all the alchemical pieces of the plant are suspended in solution, in a state of chaos. Then by a process of filtration and distillation, he separates-out each of the individual pieces, which he calls (again):

- (1) Salt Body (Sal Salis)
- (2) Fixed Sulphur (Salt of Sulphur)
- (3) Ethanol (Mercury)
- (4) Volatile Sulphur.

In the attached diagram we can see this system laid out graphically. Spheres (1) (2) and (3) are water, the plant matter and ethanol, respectively.

Sphere (4) is these substances digesting together (the chaos). Out of this chaos we separate (5) Sulphur, (6) dilute Ethanol, and (7) Salt.

The Sulphur (5) can then be categorised as (8) Salt of Sulphur, and (9) Volatile Sulphur (essential oils in plants).

The dilute Ethanol can be rectified, and separated into pure Ethanol, which is now called (10) vegetable Mercury, and (11) Water (H₂O)

The first thing we need to grasp about this method is that it does not appear in almost any other area of traditional alchemical theory or instruction. This method can be said to be almost entirely Albertus' process.

The Second thing I think we might see is that if we have any real serious background in technical alchemical theory and philosophy, Albertus' method is both messy, and it lacks some essential items. For example, in Albertus' system there is no real teaching that discusses and shows where the 'Elements' are, relative to the plant. He jumps directly from the chaos to the Principals being extracted, and then he cleans these Principals and puts them back together to form the final unity. This situation confused me for years. In accepting this basic method of dealing with plants we are almost required to ignore the concept of the Elements, as well as have no real idea how the Elements are related to the Principals.

This problem, in later years, caused me to come up with the conclusion that the Elements and the Principals were in fact the same thing, and that maybe Albertus, seeing this, simply preferred to drop the concept of the Elements for simplicity sake, and talk only about the Principals. Some other authors from the classic period ... a couple at least ... also look at the situation similarly, and outright say so. So that helped me decide that maybe this was the case ... the Elements and the Principals must be the same thing.

The problem this idea raises is that this means when talking only about Principals, we must discard one of the Elements, because the former has only 3 facets, and the latter 4. This then becomes the source of a new set of confusion. Why did Paracelsus in inventing the 3 Principal concept discard one of the Elements? Then, which Element did he discard? Water or Earth? (These two being often both or differently ascribed to the Salt Principal, in order to make this theory work).

So, in the final estimation, Albertus' system of attributes is messy, has bits missing, and is the source of a lot of confusing juggling in trying to make it fit with old, traditional, alchemic theory.

Ok, so now let us next look at what Ripley has to say on this whole subject, in my next essay.

ESSAY SIXTY-EIGHT

Random Essay - 3b - 'Defining The Elements and The Principals'

"The Ripley Version"

So I've explained in very basic terms Frater Albertus' way of looking at the Elements and Principals. I also pointed out that because Albertus' system is the one most of us come in to lab alchemy learning and practicing, that Albertus' views have an imprinting effect on the way we look at alchemy in the broader view.

For example, one of the things my teacher repeated, and which I was told by another teacher, also a student of Albertus', is that after studying Albertus' plant work, when we move on to the acetate path we will see the two works are virtually identical.

In truth, that isn't the case. I now think that Albertus knew it should be the case, somehow, but that he himself had not managed to iron out the very obvious discrepancies between the two works.

In making this point I should explain, for anyone who does not already realise, Frater Albertus, while he researched a number of approaches to the Great Work of confecting the Philosopher's Stone, behind the scenes, was primarily the champion of what we commonly know today as the Acetate Path (a phrase he may have himself coined).

So now let us consider just how these ideas of Elements and Principals look, when we view the method for the Acetate Path process. My teacher used Ripley's 'Bosome Book' as her primary source of information on this path, and although I can't remember her saying as much, she probably preferred this text

because Albertus also looked to it as his prime source of instruction.

The original version of this text can be found here:

<https://archive.org/details/collectaneachymi00phil>

A.E.Waites later re-edited version can be found here:

<https://archive.org/details/39002086305399.med.yale.edu>

Ripley begins by making a metallic acetate (for argument sake, lead (Pb) in this case). See attached diagram.

He then destructively distills this lead acetate and it decomposes in to a number of substances. If we put the lead acetate in to a retort, ease the heat up by stages until we reach around 350°C, and thereby destructively distill the acetate in one long unbroken process (as most of the old alchemists would have done), at first two substances arise:

- (1) A transparent liquid that looks like water,
- (2) A yellow-reddish substance that looks like oil.

If we then take these two substances, separated, and distill each separately, the water-like substance divides in to:

- (1) Water, and
- (2) A volatile spirit (acetone)

If you take the oil-like substance and distill that by itself, we get:

- (3) A semi-volatile oil, and
- (4) A salt

What began (in the alchemist's eyes) as one substance (lead acetate) then became two substances (the transparent

water and the red oil), leaving behind a third substance (a soot-like mineral salt).

Then from the first two substances (the water and oil) we then get four substances (water, a volatile spirit, a volatile oil, and a salt).

For Ripley the 'chaos' state was the metallic acetate. He saw the action of the acetic acid on the metal as the acid retrograding the metal back to its root-substance ... a gum-like chaos.

This gum was seen as the proto-chaos because once distilled the 'four Elements' of creation were separated from it.

This progression of one substance, then two, then three, then four is deeply significant, because it describes in chemical language the Hermetic Philosophy of how creation came about. It is highly likely that ancient creation myths were either based on having seen this lab process, or the lab process was looked at from the point of view of the ancient creation myths. This is the intrinsic value of the destructive distillation path, because (at least from an old alchemical view) it had a direct correlation to the (magio-mystical) myths about creation. In a manner this is the means of marking the destructive distillation school as being a valid alchemical path, if not 'the' valid alchemical path, simply because this correlation exists between myth and physical demonstration.

It doesn't matter, at first, if what the old alchemists believed was going on here was accurate. What matters is what they believed, and how that is linked to this process.

So in the Ripley diagram (attached) we can see a system that not only conforms to hermetic philosophy, but it is tidy. This is important too ... because ultimately, hermetism is a philosophy concerning the fundamental orderliness underlying

reality. If all things are really One Thing, and therefore underneath the seeming randomness of daily reality there is an essential harmony, then the body of knowledge which teaches this view should itself be symmetrical, tidy and orderly. This is why, I believe, systems like qabala, astrology and tarot are appealing to us. Even though the condition they are in today might not be accurate, they present a concept of orderliness and neatness.

If we look at the Ripley diagram, there are some obvious correlations between it and the Albertus diagram. Most importantly, though, is what we end up with at the bottom of each diagram. In Albertus' system we are taught to deal with five separate substances ... one of which, water, is discarded, and we are basically encouraged to just ignore the water and only think about the remaining four substances.

In the Ripley version we end up with four substances, of which (like in the Albertus method), water is discarded. But, with the difference that we know that this water is one of the four Elements, and is not just ignored.

The major distinction between the Ripley method and the Albertus method is in the labeling of the substances. Albertus considers the salt which is separated out of the Sulphur to be part of the Sulphur itself. But Ripley carefully explains in his system that this Salt is actually the Element Earth. Once we recognise the differences at this level of the process, we start to see some very fundamental 'issues' with how things get labelled, and how those labels encourage us to think about what is going on.

I believe that in order to be able to overlap concepts from various systems, such as those of astrology, ritual, qabala, etc, so that they fit neatly together in an orderly arrangement, forming a unified science, the labeling process must be accurate. I also believe that the jumping-off place for finding this

accuracy is lab alchemy, because it is empirical, and directly associated with reality itself. It is not just a concept system ... a series of academic comparisons. It is a system of knowledge based on experiment with the very thing that is being considered, the nature of reality itself.

If this is the case, that alchemy is the touch-stone of an accurate Hermetic Science, as the old alchemists insisted it was, then before anything else we have to recognise an accuracy within alchemy itself. We have to recognise a view of alchemy which is simple, neat and orderly.

Ok, so in the third and final essay on this subject, I will discuss a comparison between Ripley's and Albertus' Elements and Principals, and why I believe Ripley's system ultimately points at the accurate view.

ESSAY SIXTY-NINE

Random Essay - 3c - 'Defining The Elements and The Principals'

"Accuracy"

Ok, so we've looked at Albertus' view of the Elements and Principals, and touched on how that has affected a large portion of our generation of students of alchemy (IMHE).

Then I've described how Ripley sees the Elements and Principals, and I've claimed that his view is nicely in harmony with ancient alchemical and Hermetic tradition. That is ... out of chaos a Binary, then three Principals, then the four Elements out of the Principals.

Now I'm going to attempt to describe the way I look at the value in Ripley's version, and the lack of value in Albertus'. That is something I have not really put into words before, so bare with me.

First let us consider an interesting concept which has been part of alchemical philosophy for a very long time, but which we rarely hear mentioned today. That is that alchemy was referred to by the alchemists of past eras as Philosophy by Fire. This term was used because of a secret that the old Adepts knew, about alchemy, and that is that everything we accomplish in alchemy is accomplished with one tool ... fire. Fire is our lever.

By fire we decompose our matter, recompose it, sustain it and evolve it, simply by increasing the temperature, or reducing it. This is one of the core lessons of The Golden Chain of Homer.

This is the first idea we need to hold in mind.

Next, we should think carefully about just what the Elements and the Principals are. Not in theory, but in actuality. To alchemy they are the fundamental conditions upon which our reality is built. In a similar way to which quarks and bosons are the fundamental particles which make up physical matter. But notice I did not say ... physical reality ... when I defined the nature of the Elements and Principals. I said ... the fundamental 'conditions' upon which 'our reality' is built. By this I refer to the fact that our reality is not simply physical, but is a combination of physicality, energy and information.

This means that the four Elements and the three Principals are more than simple physical stuff. Their existence, their 'condition' and their effects operate on all levels. We are told this and consider it on occasion, but for the most part students of lab alchemy look at what they do as a very physical process. The manipulation of chemicals.

Because the Elements and the Principals operate on more than a bluntly superficial physical level, as chunks of stuff, when we manipulate them in the laboratory we should recognise in our operations adjustments being made on these other levels. When we contemplate and calculate what is happening in our flasks we should recognise that parts of the alchemical dynamic are hidden from our physical senses, and might only be recognised by the mind ... for example.

This is the second idea we need to hold in mind.

The third idea we need to hold in mind is one I have presented previously ... a need for order, symmetry and unity in any theory. Since one of the fundamental premises about the Hermetic Science is that ... in being a Science about unity, it, itself, should be unified in itself. In seeking the Stone we seek to hold the result of that unity in our hands.

Now, first Albertus, again. I have made my point that I feel his theory and practice is not as orderly as it should be. I have also commented that I felt he had left important pieces of the puzzle out of this view. I want to add to this now that I also feel that his method does not hold true enough to the underlying philosophy of Fire, since his initial dissection of material anatomy relies primarily on a fluid solvent. This is not so much a big issue, but I think it does have weight. Next, I believe Albertus' approach has no depth. Primarily it is a manipulation of substances (chemicals), in a similar genre to other forms of pharmacy, demonstrating no need for an unseen factor in the method. Relying entirely on physical manipulation. Where does the unseen factor shine through in Albertus' method? In theory it is there, of course. But can we see it in the work?

Finally, Albertus' methodology has consistently shown poor end results. In not one case of producing a plant tincture (simple) have I ever heard that upon ingestion significant effect was had. In Albertus' process for a plant Stone, there has always been serious argument that in the last measure that Stone does not do what alchemical theory says it should do.

Now, Ripley. His method and theory is neater, more orderly and has symmetry. It is also more complete. Ripley's process relies fundamentally, at the outset, on dissection by Fire. At the same time Ripley's process has depth. In the destructive distillation of organic matter we can envision, easily, manipulation of reality at various levels and as much as our simple investigations can conceive, these other levels of activity add only to the depth and rounding-out of the theory of alchemical operation. Molecules are being ionised and re-constructed. Geometry of molecules is being changed. Energy is being released and re-absorbed. The blue print of substances is altering.

Again, finally, Ripley's method 'produces'. I mean by this something closer to Albertus' plant work. In Hollandus' Plant

Work we have a process that neatly mirrors Ripley's Acetate Path, since both are based on the destructive distillation of organic matter. Through Hollandus' process ... which surely harkens back to Llull's school of thought ... we know the end products of the Hollandus method have powerful alchemical impact. Not only that but we also know, from our early research, that substances and 'conditions' along the path to Hollandus' final plant products also have unusual and alchemically predictable (philosophic) properties.

Lastly, I think most of us who care to have thought about just what the Elements and the Principals really are, and how we should label the substances and conditions we see in the lab process in order to reach an accurate a reliable unified theory, would agree that for the most part in popular occultism this subject is messy, discussed rarely in detail, and has holes in it. For years, in search for a tidy theory of how the Principals and Elements operated, so that I could build a firm foundation upon which to erect a strong general Hermetic view of reality, I regularly juggled the Element/Principal theories common in popular Hermetism. While I came close to some satisfying arrangements of theory, nothing ever was complete and neatly fitted together. In this way I believe that the common view of the concepts of the Elements and Principals in the mainstream Western esoteric teaching is superficially flawed.

Albertus' plant work did not gel with the Acetate Work. The two works are quite distinctly different, although based on similar concepts superficially. This again is a messy situation. But Hollandus' Plant Work fits perfectly with the Acetate Work, giving us a system of alchemical study which progresses from the lesser mystery to the greater neatly ... and also provides us with a theory and philosophy of alchemical practice that is unified and universal.

It is quite peculiar that in all the alchemical works available to us today, via the internet, that Hollandus is one single soul

who applies the Acetate Path destructive distillation method to the Plant process, and describes it openly. Doubtless, other alchemists have followed this method too ... but virtually none ever published on the subject, not even to mention it by association, or as a hint. This neat correlation between Hollandus' Plant process and the Acetate Path has been so well hidden that today, until relatively recently, almost nobody had heard of or even conceived of such a possibility. Because this coming together of ideas is re-building a more symmetrical and harmonious view of alchemy overall, the view of the Elements and Principals tucked away inside this system is important to grasp in detail.

So for the first time in possibly some hundreds of years we are starting to witness a re-emergence of a more harmonious and holistic view of lab alchemy ... and a part of having access to that view is that we will now slowly, I am sure, start to see a rectification of the messy ideas that have crept in to alchemical knowledge do to the degraded state of mainstream teaching that has come to us out of the end of the renaissance.

Consider the attached diagrams. I've shown much of this before. But I'll repeat it here.

The central glyph is of course the qabalistic tree of life. This glyph is essentially a very simple depiction of how, after reality is created, the Elements and Principals are related to each other. We know from qabalistic doctrine that all the ten sephiroth emerge by stages out of the first sephiroth, kether. Kether is the single unified point. Kether then divides itself in to Chockmah (masculine) and Binah (feminine) ... a binary condition. In this way One becomes Two, and together they are Three. So the Three Principals are the first 'condition'.

On the left side of the graphic we see what is known as the Rose Cross Lamén, well known by Adepts of the GD tradition. Whoever designed this glyph was very cunning, because in its

simplest form it is simply an arrangement of all the key concepts about the qabalistic Elements and Principals that appear of the 'Tree' glyph, but arranged into a cross format. So the Rose Cross Lamén is really just a different version of the Tree of Life, constructed in a format more neatly aligned with magical usage.

On the far right of the graphic we see again my diagram, or part of it, a flow chart of the Ripley process. This flow chart is a mechanical (alchemical) version of how the ideas presented in the Tree of Life and the Rose Cross Lamén 'unfold'.

Each of these glyphs throws light on the others, and together they represent a huge body of core Hermetic doctrine, pointing at a balanced and symmetrical relationship between magic, qabala and alchemy ... the three core bodies of teaching in Western Hermetism.

From the foundation laid down in the concepts explained in these diagrams, we can extrapolate the attributions of the partzufim, and begin to develop an understanding of how the lab process is applied internally to the mind.

ESSAY SEVENTY

Random - The Boundary or Wall

I have been re-reading and thinking over my recent email to Ir?r?im, and considered it is probably a good idea to talk in more detail about the concept I have described as 'The Boundary' and 'The Wall'. I know a bunch of you are thinking about this concept a lot, both to try and understand what it might be, and if it can be overcome.

So I have spent all morning mucking about trying to draft up a diagram which shows the concept of the boundary in relation to overall reality. The attached diagram is my best attempt this morning at trying to graphically represent the concept of the structure of reality (as I see it), and the position the boundary holds in that scheme. So it is a first attempt, and therefore a rough draft, of these ideas in graphic format.

I'll begin by explaining the various aspects of this diagram.

It is best to consider this diagram, overall, as a continuum of conscious, not so much as 'locations' in time, space and mind. In this way this diagram displays the relationships various forms of awareness have to each other.

Firstly, I divide reality into three primary fields ... (1) the exosphere (the physical universe), (2) the esosphere (the non-physical universe, or mind), and (3) the hypersphere (the collective unconscious). Then each of these three primary divisions contains sub-divisions of reality or consciousness.

In the exosphere we have both the physical universe composed of matter (particles and waves), as well as the thinking mind (ruach). The thinking mind, while part of the psyche, is 'in' the exosphere because its function is almost

entirely obsessed with observing, analysing, judging and forming plans about physical reality.

Between the exosphere and the esosphere we have the sub-conscious mind. In order to understand what the subconscious mind is it is easiest to think of it as your imagination. (It is important to pay attention here because most people, familiar with pop psychology, use the term subconscious when they are talking about the un-conscious). So imagining, daydreaming and night dreaming are occurring in the subconscious. If your entire reality was compared by analogy to a computer, your subconscious is both the computer monitor and the graphic user interface (such as Mac or Windows), where symbols representing the inner workings of the binary code are represented.

The subconscious is composed of part physical items (images taken from memory that were originally observed by ruach in physical reality), and part from the unconscious (the hidden dynamic or life behind the symbolic images).

So the subconscious is part conscious and part unconscious. So it is a 'medium' between the ruach and the nephesh. So the dash-line represented vertically inside the subconscious sphere symbolizes this division between part conscious and part unconscious.

Behind the subconscious is the un-conscious. Our personal unconscious. Where everything we personally are, but are 'unconscious' of, is stored and lives. In present life we cannot take our conscious awareness in to the unconscious. The only way we can experience what is in the unconscious is by getting our mind to translate the activity in the unconscious into symbolic images, feelings, sounds, tastes, etc, and project these symbols onto the monitor of the subconscious viewing screen. So the unconscious is like the hard drive and processor of your computer. You cannot stick your head inside your hard

drive or processor and see this document in there. It exists inside the hardware in a format your physical senses cannot grasp. So your computer is designed to take that raw binary data and present it in a 'windows' format, on your monitor, so you can see a simulacrum of what is on the hard drive, and what is passing through the processor.

In the absolute depths of the personal unconscious is your higher genius (HG). Your HG is in a way the boundary between your personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. Your HG filters all of the universal reality and projects in to you only the tiny bit that is of use to your individual life.

Behind the HG is the collective unconscious ... peopled with all the 'Stars' of the sidereal firmament, which are the higher genii (and other species) of other intelligent life. Back of all of that is the Supreme Being Itself (G).

Ok, let us now consider the boundary. When 'God' divided Itself, and created the binary from Its unity, a dividing force had to be established in order to keep one side of the binary separated from the other side. If that dividing force wasn't there then the two poles of the binary would *snap* back together into unity. That separating force ?I? have labelled 'S' in the attached diagram.

This 'S' can be seen just above an object I have labelled 'Boundary'. This psychological wall exists at the boundary between the extreme reaches of conscious awareness, and the edge of the unconscious. In other words, our conscious awareness can stretch backwards, right inside the esosphere, deep into the subconscious, but no further than the boundary. Once our awareness crosses that boundary we flop into unconsciousness. In fact, our awareness is 'conscious' on the other side of the boundary, but once our consciousness withdraws back into the subconscious, and then further back

into physical awareness, whatever it was aware of in the unconscious stays behind the boundary.

In this way, at night when you are asleep, and therefore 'unconscious', you are not blank and doing nothing. You are actually existing in another reality. But as you begin to wake, and your awareness slips back through the boundary, the gateway in the boundary snaps shut ... and the sleep activity memory stays in the unconscious.

But sometimes the gateway doesn't snap back quick enough, and hangs open for a bit, while your awareness is still in the subconscious. What happens then is that the memory of what you were up to in the sleep-unconscious leaks out into the subconscious, and so you experience a 'dream'. A dream being the translation of unconscious activity in to symbolic format.

Because the unconscious 'stuff' is now translated into symbols taken from memory of physical stuff, when your conscious mind observes the dream it recognises the symbols ... "oh there is Bob, and Jane, and we are back at my old highschool' ... etc. But while the conscious awareness recognises the symbols, it usually has no idea what the symbols mean. That is, what story the unconscious is telling about your night activities.

So to begin, the first way to look at the boundary is that it is the force that holds the two major poles of reality apart. The second way to look at the boundary is that it is the thing that divides consciousness from unconsciousness. Next, we can understand that in fact we are passing across this boundary all the time ... but we cannot take stuff from one side to the other ... the stuff at each side must be kept separated.

Now let us consider how this natural structure fits into the desire to be an initiate and to become Illuminated.

We know that when the content of our unconscious (our night activities during sleep, for example), are projected down from the unconscious, through the boundary gate (which is still open), a filter is placed on that information which converts the reality of the unconscious into symbolic format. There is no Bob and Jane and no highschool. These two people and the school represent some other thing.

When we become aware of this Bob and Jane 'dream', we recognise Bob and Jane and the highschool, but we have no idea what it all means. So ... we interpret. Basically, we guess what it means. This guesswork or interpretation is key to the role the boundary plays, because we will guess at the meaning based on our life experience, and to some degree our guesswork will always involve inaccuracy. This is because the 'separation' (S) force in us ... part of it involves ?degrees of ?ignorance in all things. Also things like fear, opposition, etc. So our ability to figure out the meaning of the Bob and Jane dream is affected by our personal 'issues' ... and these issues are closely tied to the 'S' force and to separation.

Now, let us consider meditation. Specifically, pathworking, visualisation or creative visualisation. All forms of meditation which involve mucking about in the subconscious. That is, meditations which involve our playing with the images on our internal computer monitor. So a pathworking, for example, is like Googling an image search for, let's say, 'The 25th Path of the Tree of Life'. But instead of our inner Google giving us a few pages of dozens of static images to scroll through ... it is more like a video Google, where all the static images are morphed together into a movie, and presented as an overall story.

Now let's say that you are doing a pathworking and you've mentally Googled some concept and while walking through your virtual reality Google result, along a pathway in the mountains, you come across an angel-like figure who says its your HG.

Now the place on our diagram where you are experiencing this virtual Google result is on the left-hand side of the boundary. This means the reality of your HG is being filtered through the boundary translator, and is now a symbol. That means ... your HG is 'not' an angel. The translator simply picked an angel picture from your memory because that picture best describes, symbolically, what your HG is like, to you.

The next thing you do is 'interpret' this experience. Depending on whether you are a ?motor mechanic, a ?newage hippy, a psychologist, a GD initiate, or one of my students, what you choose to believe about this 'angel' will differ.

If you now take this scenario, and consider just how complex the symbolism in pathworkings is, and how ignorant people are about the true nature of the mind, it starts to become obvious why some people might believe their HG is literally a feminine dude with seagull wings and pretty pre-Raphaelite ?jim-jams?.

It should now be easy to grasp that while the angel might in fact be your HG, the problem isn't whether you can communicate with your HG, the problem is ... can you speak the language? Just how distorted is your interpretation of the translation? I can absolutely assure you that for 99.999 percent of people the distortion is HUGE. ?Assumption?, based on all kinds of personal preferences and 'issues' takes over.

So how do we fix this? The ancients discovered that the only reliable method was to understand the translation device (to know how the inner Google works). Once that happens ... once you know the rules the translator is using to pick it's symbolic images, then you know what those images are really telling you. In order to do this ... because the very act of translation is tied up with the boundary ... one must first understand the boundary.? That means understanding the 'S' force.?

ESSAY SEVENTY-ONE

Book Discussion - The Rosie Crucian Secrets

This book is an interesting curiosity amid the collection of alchemical (lab) texts we have access today. I must admit I kind of chuckle about this work because few people had heard of this text until one of my past students took a digital version of the book I had compiled, and against my best wishes dumped copies at various places online. So for the record, most of the digital copies of this text that can be found online are copies from my original transcription ... and they are incomplete. (You'll notice at the front of that version of the text an old alias I used in my GD days ... Frater CHA. (Chockmah Ha Aben).

So the first thing to be aware of is that this online digital version is likely not the complete, original, text. I deliberately left out a couple of sections of the book which simply reproduced texts that can be found elsewhere.

Most modern versions of this book came from the Aquarian Press publication. But Holmes Publishing also did a version (which I have never seen). I discovered this book because it was in my teacher's library, photocopied it and bound it into a copy for myself. The original, original, is a manuscript in the British Museum. An English gentleman by the name of Langford Garstin (of GD fame) found the original and had it published (I've never seen or heard of his original publication). Garstin did us a great service in giving a really informative preface to his version, and copious dependable footnotes.

The original text was attributed to John Dee (of fame), simply because in the margins of the original manuscript someone had written notes to the effect that the work had been copied from a Dee original. But Garstin points out this is unlikely, because A.E.Waite noted that parts of The Rosie

Crucian Secrets were transcribed (and altered slightly) from a book by John Heydon ... The Wise man's Crown (which can be downloaded for free from www.archive.org).

So for all intents and purposes it looks like the original Manuscript might have been someone's attempt at compiling texts from various sources into a single volume, to act as a kind of manual in Rosicrucian labwork.

The original manuscript is divided in to four sections:

1. A kind of introduction (a very philosophic description of how to make the Stone)
2. A series of serious alchemic recipes
3. A lexicon of alchemic terminology (claimed to come from Dee, but that is unlikely).
4. A bunch of information on the Rosicrucians plagerised from Thomas Vaughan (?).

In the version I produced of this text I left out the lexicon and the Vaughan section.

The section of this book which is most curious, and which contains a number of hidden gems, is the recipe section. So I am going to discuss one part of that section, mainly because the guy who asked me to discuss this book asked me to specifically talk about the description of the acetate path in this book. He asked this mainly because he knows I have mentioned in a number of places why this piece of the book is important, but never previously said exactly why.

In this text the author was careful to reproduce John Heydon's commentary on 'The Work of Saturn' (the acetate path). He pretty much stuck to Heydon's exact description, but he did add to (or alter) and remove some small pieces of Heydon's original. So it is interesting to go back to Heydon's original and compare notes. The author of the R+C Secrets also

sort of split up the complete story of the acetate path in the recipe section, placing a description of the method of multiplying the Stone earlier in the text, and a couple of smaller notes on the overall process in a later part of the recipe section.

There are three concepts that are (IMHO) important about the description of the acetate work in the R+C Secrets.

Firstly, almost the entire process is described without veil (except of course the information about the core secret - the relationship of Lull's spirit of wine to the work, which nobody discussed openly).

Secondly, details are given about parts of the work which do not appear anywhere else, and important technical cypher-words are explained.

Thirdly, a curious method for dealing with what I refer to as the Salt Enigma is revealed.

One of the reasons why this text is so curious is because Heydon (the source work), is well known as a pop author on the subject of Rosicrucianism. What he lacks in depth, he makes up for in volume, since his books are very obviously extremely long rants on a very superficial view of esoteric ideas. So the fact Heydon wrote on this detailed description of the acetate path, with some rare keys to the work, is kind of weird. But it also suggests that even though he wrote in a manner where he seems to claim to have carried out each process himself, it can't be ignored that it might actually be that he was quoting someone else. Which means there might be a hither-to unknown source work.

The main reason why I have made reference to The Rosie Crucian Secrets, over the years, is because of the solution it provides to the Salt Enigma. The Salt Enigma, explained simply, is the problem of being able to sublimate the fixed

mineral salt which is the basis of the Stone. Of course, if you have Lull's 'Spirit of Philosophic Wine', this problem is automatically solved (if you know what to do with it). But many acetate path alchemists were unaware of this solvent, or knew of it but could not figure out how to obtain it. So they designed other methods for sublimating the mineral salt without Lull's special solvent. The Work of Saturn in the R+C Secrets shows one of these methods.

The trick is relatively simple. But unless you are well educated and experienced in the near-end process of the Great Work, if you read the R+C Secrets you'd probably not understand the importance of what you were reading.

Heydon provides us with this solution ...

"Having thus described the work, I now come to the explanation and say that the calcination of the body is two-fold, for the calcination thereof in the shorter work for extracting the Heart of Saturn is done on any wise by Aqua Fortis.

Take eight or ten ounces of Lead in filings and dissolve it in Aqua Fortis in double proportion and justified with Salt Armoniack in an earthen vessel with a narrow neck and set in ashes till it be totally dissolved; and there will remain a white matter in the bottom like grains of white Salt, which is a figure of perfect solution. Then pour your matter that is dissolved in the water into a body and set thereon a limbeck and in Balneo, draw away the corrosive water till there remain a dry substance in the bottom, and so you have the body converted white by calcination with corrosive water out of which the Heart of Saturn is to be drawn.

The way to wash away and purge the corrosive water from the body. Pour warm water upon the substance in the limbeck and pour it often off till it have no sharpness at all upon the tongue and then the body is prepared for drawing out the Salt.

When your matter is well dried, dissolve it again in distilled Vinegar and distil the Vinegar twice or thrice from it and in the bottom you shall have a lucid, clear and white, shining Salt, which is called the Heart of Saturn."

The old alchemists knew that when you calcined a mineral salt effectively, it basically converted into a white salt/powder. They called these calcined minerals 'calxes' or 'vitriols', most often. (Frequently these calxes were the oxides of minerals and metals). It just so happens that if you take raw lead metal, break it up into filings, and dissolve it in Aqua Regia, the result of a white calx-like powder. Since the old alchemists had no modern understanding of chemical stoichiometry, they didn't know that lead oxide, or carbonate, was chemically different from this calx made from aqua regia, which is lead chloride. To them the result was the same ... a clean white powder. The salt of the metal.

In this way the old alchemists decided, and claimed, that strong acids such as aqua regia were 'calcining waters'. Which they also termed 'corrosive waters'. Because they seemed to corrode metals down to their basic salts (calxes).

But, as I mentioned earlier, even though this process can work, the more advanced Adepts of the lab tradition made this following point very clear:

"We calcine our earth not with fire, but with our water, and our water is not a corrosive water..." Etc (my paraphrase). The advanced adepts who made this statement were, of course, referring to a philosophic calcining water, and hinting that they possessed Lull's Spiritus Vitae.

ESSAY SEVENTY-TWO

Book Discussion - Alchemy Rediscovered and Restored

Frater Albertus is probably responsible for making Archibald Cockren famous by using his book "Alchemy Rediscovered and Restored" as a kind of text book in his classes. Cockren was previously a somewhat obscure British alchemist working in the UK during WWII. In fact it is known that Cockren's lab was bombed during the Blitzkrieg. From the title of Cockren's book we can get a glimpse of the fact that during his lifetime the facts of lab alchemy were virtually unknown in the esoteric community. Cockren saw himself as part of a wave of rediscovery of lab alchemy. A growing re-emergence of that very secretive period back into awareness in the wider esoteric community.

Back when Albertus advised his students to read Cockren, 'Alchemy Rediscovered and Restored' was published in a very cheap format of soft cover with spiral binding in A5. In fact when I brought my copy in about 1992 that was still the only way you could get it.

There were basically two reasons why Albertus recommended reading Cockren. Firstly, because the book gave what could probably be the first published attempt at looking at alchemy through a modern point of view. Cockren discussed what alchemy was about by comparing it to modern ideas about nutrition and other related concepts. At the same time he gave a short but helpful history of alchemy and some important alchemists. He also condensed down all the key philosophic concepts concerning hermetic alchemy and described them very clearly.

But the thing that Albertus was most interested in was the fact that Cockren was an acetate path alchemist. Few students of alchemy, before Albertus' time, would probably have recognised that fact just from a cursory reading of the text. For anyone not already familiar with the fact, before anything else Albertus was a champion of the acetate path. At the same time the central thread which was woven through the teaching he provided at his school was aimed at providing the student with everything he needed in order to effectively approach the acetate path. But Albertus rarely explained his plan openly. He preferred students figure out what he was teaching on their own, and so at the end of his seven year long training course he told students of the seventh year class ... "when you figure out from everything I've taught you how to make the Philosophic Mercury, only then consider yourself a graduate".

So one of the key reasons Albertus recommended Cockren's book was that it pointed at the acetate path. But, specifically, Cockren gave mention in that book to an important secret (at that time) of the acetate path. In his chapter on the practical work Cockren begins by telling us the different metals (and minerals) he experimented with, in seeking the origin of matter (the prima materia). Antimony first, then copper and iron. Then silver and mercury. Then gold. Then Cockren tells us ...

"Here, then, I entered upon a new course of experiment, with a metal for experimental purposes with which I had had no previous experience. This metal, after being reduced to its salts and undergoing special preparation and distillation, delivered up the Mercury of the Philosophers, the Aqua Benedicta, the Aqua Celestis, the Water of Paradise."

A little bit of quick calculation will show that thusfar Cockren had experimented with Antimony and five of the seven traditional metals. So in the above statement we can easily guess that the metal he had not previously experimented with must have been either Lead or Tin. Experience shows it was

Lead. Then, anyone who is familiar with the destructive distillation of a metallic acetate can easily see in his brief description that he had distilled the acetate of Lead in order to obtain the Aqua Benedicta, or Mercury of the Philosophers.

Albertus rarely discussed this passage with his students (as I understand it), but often hinted that in Cockren's text the secret of the crude matter was thinly veiled. The reference was to the above passage.

The following quote from Cockren describes what he understood about this Celestial water ...

"This water had then to be separated by distillation, the outcome being the white mercurial water described by the Comte St. Germain as his athoeter or primary water of all the metals. I will again quote from Manly Hall's introduction to 'The Most Holy Trinosophia,' the passage in which Casanova describes the athoeter:

'Then he showed me his magistrum which he called Athoeter. It was a white liquid contained in a well stopped phial. He told me that this liquid was the universal spirit of Nature and that if the wax of the stopper was pricked ever so slightly, the whole of the contents would disappear. I begged him to make the experiment. He thereupon gave me the phial and the pin and I myself pricked the wax, when, lo, the phial was empty.'

This passage aptly describes this water which is so volatile that it rapidly evaporates if left unstoppered, boils at a very low temperature, and does not so much as wet the fingers. This mercurial water, this athoeter of St. Germain, is absolutely necessary to obtain the oil of gold, which is obtained by its addition to the salts of gold after those salts have been washed with distilled water several times to remove the strong acidity of the Aqua Regia used to reduce the metal to that state."

The statement about the production of the oil of gold made at the end of the above quote caught Jean Dubuis' eye, after he first experimented with the spiritus distillate of Lead acetate. He produced this oil of gold a number of times during the late 90's (before he died), and shared the results with his closest students.

In a similar way to the above ideas, anyone familiar with the behaviour of the distillate products of Lead acetate will also recognise the following quote taken from further on in Cockren's chapter on the practical work ...

"From the golden water I have described can be obtained this white water, and a deep red tincture which deepens in colour the longer it is kept; these two are the mercury and the sulphur described by the alchemists, Sol the Father and Lune the Mother, the Male and the Female Principles, the White and Red Mercuries, which two conjoined again form a deep amber liquid."

That deepening of the colour of the Sulphur Principal, over time, is indicative of the nature of the distillate products of metallic acetates.

Toward the end of the chapter on the practical work Cockren provides us with a very simple and clear description of exactly what the confection of the philosopher's stone looks like toward the end of the Great work.

So, this is what caused Cockren and his little book to become so important in certain alchemical circles.

ESSAY SEVENTY-THREE

Book Discussion - Lapidus' 'In Pursuit of Gold'

Ok, so the first thing to say about this book is that it comes from the Regulus of Antimony Path. (The author begins to present that idea on page 67). As I mentioned earlier I know little about this path, so I won't have much to say here, particularly about the Regulus Path itself. Most of my comments are things related to the time the book was published in, and cursory observations on things that came along as part of the Regulus package. Also just some general history and comparative notes.

So the book was first published in 1976 by Samuel Weiser Inc. I have the first edition in hardback (see attached pic). Its full title is 'In Pursuit of Gold - Alchemy today in theory and practice'. The author gives his name simply as 'Lapidus'. His real name was David Curwen (who died in 1984), which was revealed by his pseudo-co-author Stephen Skinner.

The first thing that jumped to my attention here was the meaning of the title itself. Authors spend a lot of time thinking about an ideal title for their books. Especially their first book. It struck me that Lapidus didn't choose a relatively nondescript title, or one with an esoteric bent, but clearly pointed at that fact he saw alchemy as ... 'A Pursuit of Gold'. For me that was suspect from the get-go. The book itself admits to be only concerned with a completely physical side of alchemy.

The other curious thing about the title page is the fact that the author published under an alias. In 1976 not only had very few serious modern books been published on practical alchemy (in the English speaking world), but none really had been published so blatantly using a pseudonym, from someone who was almost totally unknown. So this immediately cast a shadow

of mystery and suspense over the author and over the book. Lapidus was for a short time earning himself a celebrity almost equal to that of Fulcanelli. It was a short lived celebrity though, because little more really evolved out of the opinions the author gave in his book, in the public arena. So the work had become a little obscure until Salamander and Sons publishing decided to make it popular again.

One of the things that made this book popular in the first instance was that it was serious and was published well before the internet. So it was full of information that was then hard to find. Of most note was that the author includes a quote of the full 'Secret Book of Artephius', which at that time was very hard to find, and a lot of people were interested in. We might even say that a lot of people might have originally bought the book just to get a copy of 'The Secret Book' (of Artephius).

The main theme, for me, as to why the book might have lapsed into relative obscurity over the last 15 years or so, is concerning what might be a very poor understanding of the subject matter the author made his overall argument. For my part this is the most curious thing about the book, because it is like a snap shot of a point in time and in that era's mainstream understanding of alchemy.

Lapidus, in presenting a text on the subject of the Regulus of Antimony, begins by making one major mistake in his thesis. He is searching for a solution to the Regulus Path, but he is confusing texts and terminology from the Acetate Path with those allegedly describing the Path of the Regulus. This is the most obvious problematic issue of Lapidus' text.

Lapidus' thesis is based on an understanding of three classic texts ... Pontanus' 'Sophic Fire', Artephius' 'Secret Book', and Ripley's 'Twelve Gates' (with some interest in Atalanta Fugiens). The first thing we should notice is that historically we know Ripley was not a champion of the Path of the Star

Regulus of Antimony. He was by far the penultimate Acetate Path alchemist. Ripley's 'Twelve Gates' is undoubtedly his most important work (historically), and it is a work on the subject of the Acetate Path.

Immediately after Lapidus' chapter on Antimony, where he reveals his focus on the Regulus Path, there are two more chapters which are a dead give away as to the central mistake the author is making in his thesis. The next chapter is titled 'The Green Lion' and the one following that is titled 'The Red Man and his White Wife'. Both of these concepts are drawn directly from the Acetate Path tradition, and are completely misunderstood by Lapidus.

This really is a fascinating page in the history of alchemy (for me anyway), because it is a snapshot in time of a confusion that was rife up until about 10 years ago, in European alchemy. Especially on the Continent. At that time I was discussing details of the Acetate Path on various alchemical forums, particularly Rubellus' forum. At the same time a number of students of alchemy in Europe, who were gaining minor celebrity status, were arguing with me that the entire concept of the Acetate Path was a modern invention, and had absolutely no historic basis in fact. Their focus was on the Regulus and on the Cinnabar Path, and as a result of their ignorance of the Acetate tradition, they were all routinely trying to twist the meaning of Acetate texts to fit into the Regulus theory. (Which was a very common behaviour back then).

This entire situation surprised the hell out of me, because knowledge of the Acetate Path had been made well known by Albertus. But now it was becoming obvious that a big chunk of the continental European alchemical community (Particularly in France, Italy, Portugal and Spain), had grown so inward looking and incestuous, that it had convinced itself that the Regulus of Antimony was virtually the only real path to the Stone, and had missed or lost note of the existence of the Acetate tradition..

The door that opens into this messy swamp of misunderstanding begins with the word 'Antimony'. Ripley and other Acetate alchemists use that word as a cipher, to hide a secret. Or they use it to point out that antimony itself can be used in the Acetate Work. So Regulus Path alchemists grab on to that single word, in some Acetate texts, and immediately believe that this means the text is describing the Regulus of Antimony Path. This is one of the main mistakes Lapidus makes. Anyone with a reasonable grasp of alchemy generally could imagine, then, how confused any attempt at understanding the Regulus work might become when entire traditions are being twisted and confused.

Another excellent example of why I insist ... know your history.

Is there any value in *The Pursuit of Gold*? It certainly is a worthwhile read. If for nothing more than its value as a historic oddity. The three classic texts Lapidus presents are also interesting, and this is a good source work for them. Other than that :-/ I think the book has virtually no value at all. I certainly don't know of any Regulus student who pays any serious attention to it.

ESSAY SEVENTY-FOUR

Book Discussion - The Book of Lambspring

I find the book of Lambspring particularly interesting because it is one of those alchemical texts which is obviously written by an alchemist who has intimate experience of both the labwork and the inner work. We can see this clearly in both the pictures and the attending text (which text I have not included in the attachments).

As far as we can tell the original author was a German by the name of Johannes Lambspring (which in fact might be an esoteric alias in reference to 'the lamb'. Johannes is the Latin form of the personal name that usually appears as "John" in English language contexts. It is a variant of the Greek name ??????? (Ioannes), itself derived from the Hebrew name Yehochanan meaning "Yahweh is gracious". The author makes reference to this concept both in the heraldic device that opens the book, and in the closing dedication to 'The King of the World'). He published his work some time before 1556. Later Nicholas Barnaud Delphinus republished a Latin translation of the original German text with new versions of the pictures. Then A.E.Waite produced an English translation and it is this edition (using Delphinus' pictures) that most modern students of alchemy are familiar with. I have attached copies of the earliest version of the pictures that form the basis of the book, and the later Delphinus version of the pictures.

As with a lot of alchemical texts the author of this work likes to tell us that he has written very clearly about the process of making the philosopher's stone. But the truth is, he couldn't be more vague if he tried (which of course is also typical). This text belongs of a very particular genre of alchemical books, the like of which can be found in A.E.Waite's "Hermetic Museum". We might call this genre 'philosophic alchemical texts', because

they do more to present abstract and general alchemical concepts, than they do to present actual workable descriptions of recipes for making the stone. So when we read Lamspring's book we are not really going to learn anything specific about how the stone is made. What he was trying to describe to us though, is a view of the process that is designed to let us see how general and relatively universal alchemical symbols were used to relate the lab work to the inner work. In this way we might understand that the lab work and the inner work were based on the same concepts.

Since the original author was German, and hails from the 16th Century, we might guess that he was part of or connected with that stream of alchemical thought for which the German and French Rosicrucians were later famous. The flavour of this text seems to point to this view, and certainly the theme of combining a knowledge of the fact the inner and lab works were related is a very rare theme in alchemical texts, and can most often be found among German alchemists between the 1500s and the 1700s. So I might suggest that since a real knowledge of the inner alchemical work is one of the rarest things in alchemical literature, and that the few texts we see that point at a knowledge of this subject stem from Germany and a little in France during this 200 year period, that we might guess that the source of this teaching was likely singular - a specific school or group of alchemists who were tied together by their mutual knowledge of this inner work.

In fact we might even go as far as suggesting that the book of Lamspring was published primarily as a kind of secret advertisement, announcing to those who could 'see', that a teaching did exist concerning the inner alchemical work in Germany at this time. In other words, this text was really written (as so many were), speaking only to alchemical Adepts of a particular (very advanced) kind.

If we remove the first engraving (in Waite's version), and divide the remaining pictures into two rows of eight engravings each, we might notice that the work is divided almost exactly into two distinct sets of ideas. The first nine engravings all have animals in them and no humans (with one exception). The last seven engravings all have humans as their central icon. We could also say that although we recognise the entire set of pictures describes in very allegorical form the process for making the stone, the first nine engravings are very obviously typical traditional lab-oriented symbols, and the second series of seven engravings tend more toward inviting in the idea of an inner work.

For the most part the animal symbols are all well known and traditional. Fishes, dragons, the deer and unicorn, the oroborus, etc.

In the Delphinus/Waite version of the text there are 17 engravings. The first I believe was a later addition, probably by Delphinus. Because the oldest known version of the book begins with the coat of arms. Of interest is the engraving which shows a wolf and a dog fighting. It is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, because this icon appears as a central theme in the 'Moon' major arcana tarot card. The idea of the difference between the domesticated and the wild dog. P.F. Case tells us that the dog, in Hermetic symbolism, often represents the ruach (thinking mind). Secondly, alchemists who follow the 'Regulus of Antimony' Path would insist, here, that the book of Lampspring belongs to their tradition, because the central symbol for Antimony in that path is 'The Grey Wolf' (a once secret name for Antimony). So it is possible that the path the author of this book was following, in the lab, used the semi-metal Antimony as its focus. Or, if the wolf in this picture is supposed to represent the idea 'Antimony', then it could be being used in its cipher aspect to represent the secret Antimony that the acetate path alchemists referred to.

We also might notice that in the first five engravings (beginning with the heraldic device), each picture has two central figures. Two lambs, two fish, a dragon and a knight, a deer and a unicorn, two lions, two canines. This twofold symbolism very likely is designed to represent the 'King and Queen' or 'Sun and Moon' or 'Sulphur and Mercury' of the early stages of the work. Which, we see, become one thing in the sixth engraving, the oroborus, a unified, cyclic substance represented by the concept of a serpent eating its own tail. One of the oldest symbols for the stone itself.

In the second series of pictures, which all contain humans as their central figures, the tenth engraving is curious because it shows a symbol which, as I've explained previously, is central to the system of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (a system which itself is said, at least in essence, to have originated in the 1700s in Germany). This symbol shows a man (specifically a King), standing on a dragon. A key concept represented by the Adept standing in the GD vault of the Adepts. We could suggest that this symbol, in the book of Lambspring, is the first obvious 'inner work' concept presented here.

The next and very overt inner work symbol can be seen in the twelfth engraving, where we see an old King, a young prince and an angel-like figure standing holding hands together. The text that accompanies this engraving says a lot:

"Here is an old father of Israel,
 Who has an only Son,
 A Son whom he loves with all his heart.
 With sorrow he prescribes sorrow to him.
 He commits him to a guide,
 Who is to conduct him whithersoever he will.
 The Guide addresses the Son in these words:
 Come hither! I will conduct thee everywhere,
 To the summit of the loftiest mountain,

That thou mayest understand all wisdom,
That thou mayest behold the greatness of the earth, and of
the sea,
And thence derive true pleasure.
I will bear thee through the air
To the gates of highest heaven.
The Son hearkened to the words of the Guide,
And ascended upward with him;
There saw he the heavenly throne,
That was beyond measure glorious.
When he had beheld these things,
He remembered his Father with sighing,
Pitied the great sorrow of his Father,
And said: I will return to his breast."

The 'old father of Israel' would to most simply refer to a Jew. But we might also take it that the author is symbolically referring to the fact this engraving has a 'qabalistic' meaning, and/or that the old king represents an Adept. That is, that it has an esoteric or inner-work reference.

The poetic text to this engraving tells a curious story, when understood as an esoteric metaphor. The 'qabalist' is an Adept, and Hermetic Adepts often referred to their pupils as their 'sons'. Thus the term 'Son of the Art' arose. The poem begins by telling us that in the earliest stage of the training this Adept gave to his student involved a stage which he describes as: "With sorrow he prescribes sorrow to him". Anyone who has walked the inner alchemical journey knows that the first stage of that work is indeed 'sorrowful'. We are then told that the Adept introduces his student to a 'guide', and we see that guide in the engraving depicted as an angel-like figure. A symbol not of a physical person, but of a spiritual intelligence. This is a very important key icon, because it says an enormous amount to anyone who has themselves worked an inner system like the one Lambspring is describing.

The guide then tells the pupil: "Come hither! I will conduct thee everywhere, To the summit of the loftiest mountain, that thou mayest understand all wisdom ..."

Anyone sufficiently familiar with the inner Hermetic alchemical work knows that this mention of a 'Mountain' where wisdom can be learned, is no mere poetic figure of speech. This is the same Mountain which Thomas Vaughan described in his book 'Lumen de Lumine'. It is the Mons Invisibalis (invisible mountain), a spiritual or psychological location. Vaughan also calls this mountain 'Scholae Magicae Typus' ... a symbol of the school of magic. In other words ... the Mons Invisibalis is an invisible (inner or spiritual) college. In the Golden Dawn system this Mountain was symbolically referred to as Mount Abeignus (The mountain of the lamb (sic: of Christ)). In the Rosicrucian tradition it is the legendary Collegium Spiritus Sanctus (College of the Holy Spirit).

The guide then says to the pupil: 'I will bear thee through the air to the gates of highest heaven.' A description any advanced student of Heredom is very familiar with.

The remainder of the text accompanying the last of the engravings is obviously more openly lab-oriented. But for anyone with real understanding of the Hermetic teacher-student relationship, some curious secrets are hidden in the turn of phrase the author has used to weave inner and outer alchemical concepts in the text accompanying the last few engravings.

ESSAY SEVENTY-FIVE

Book Discussion - Splendor Solis

Splendor Solis - Salomon Trismosin
Earliest known version 1532-35

<http://www.levity.com/alchemy/trismosn.html>

<http://www.rexresearch.com/splsol/trismosin.htm>

<https://ia801405.us.archive.org/24/items/SplendorSolisAlchemicalTreatisesOfSolomonTrismosin...Including22/SplendorSolis.pdf>

Study what thou art,
Whereof thou art a part,
What thou knowest of this art,
This is really what thou art.
All that is without thee
Also is within,
Thus wrote Trismosin.

The oldest version was composed of six chapters written in Mitteldeutsch (central German), containing 22 accompanying illuminated paintings.

This text is one of the alchemical texts I have least paid attention to in the past. Being something of an artist I primarily appreciate this work for its artistic merit, rather than from anything it might be able to offer in the way of solving the puzzle of the Great Work. In this way I place this text into a category which I refer to as aesthetic texts - because they largely only have value as ornamental objects of alchemy, not as the source of technical information.

The texts I place in this category have two things in common. They revolve largely around pictures, and their text (if

they have any) is usually poetic, and/or highly cryptic. In this way these kinds of texts offer almost no value as sources of accurate and easily discernible practical information for lab alchemists, because they are far too difficult to decipher. The complete original meaning hidden in these kinds of texts (where there is an original accurate meaning), was likely only ever known by the author and his close circle of students.

Often the symbols used in both the text and the pictures are either unique to the author, or they are borrowed from other authors and possibly used in a unique way.

I say 'where there is an original accurate meaning' because some texts in this category were produced by copying ideas, or outright plagiarising text, symbols and images, from earlier works, and compiling them in to new arrangements simply for the purpose of publishing to make money. In other words, some of these kinds of texts were not compiled by alchemists, but were produced by publishers simply as pretty books for the purpose of profit. (later versions of the Rosarium are good examples of this).

Tradition asserts that Splendor Solis was written and designed by the infamous Salomon Trismosin. If this has any basis in fact then this condition alone makes this text a very curious article. Because Trismosin has also been credited with being the main teacher of Paracelsus. What this means is that the concepts that Splendor Solis contains are possibly the same concepts at the heart of Paracelsus' alchemical knowledge. Likewise, the alchemical understanding of Paracelsus is likely to contain the key concepts Trismosin adhered to.

Splendor Solis, and texts like it, are largely only of value as purveyors of alchemical philosophy. That is, they do best at presenting 'general concepts' which are central to the alchemical paradigm. Primary themes which thread through

particular schools of alchemical thought. In this way the poetry and pictures serve mainly as reasonable focus for contemplation and meditation ... again, not as sources for detailed accurate technical knowledge for practical work in the lab. No matter how many pieces of technical information we believe these kinds of texts contain, we will never get enough of a complete technical picture in order to complete a lab work based on one of these texts. There are always patches of information which are way too vague, or missing completely. I believe it was highly likely that the authors of these kinds of texts knew they could never serve as sources of instruction in lab technicalities, so they produced them anyway, but with some other purpose in mind.

The core important themes in *Splendor Solis* are, for me ...

The dying and reborn King theme.

The inclusion of the seven planetary stages theme.

The theme of using animal and human symbols to define a specific division of the work.

The use of icons that are used in other respected texts (cross fertilization).

The fact that there is a hint in the form of the pictographs that the author knew about inner alchemy (and was likely a very learned qabalist).

The overt allusion to a work on animals, minerals and plants (a universal philosophy).

The age of this text is important too. In my opinion the further back in history we go with alchemical texts, the less complicated they are, the more they present a view which is recognisable, and the more they adhere to a more universal theme which was understood as the core philosophy of Hermetism. At the earliest stages of the Medieval period the understanding had about alchemy revolved around a very narrow spread of ideas ... and probably only 2-3 different approaches to the Great Work, which for the most part were all

based on the same core view. One of the things I love about Splendor Solis is that it contains all of these core concepts in one document.

Another important factor (IMHO) is that the oldest version of this text is German in origin. This points once again to the idea that something very extra-ordinary was going on in Germany, alchemically, in the Early 1500s. An important thing to keep in mind.

It is kind of interesting to note that because Splendor Solis contains 22 pictures, some modern students of Hermetism have tried to insist that this text is somehow an 'alchemical tarot'. This is an excellent example of how the reasoning mind will pick up on a totally superficial attribute between two unrelated systems, then try to argue a correspondence. Even if the author had an 'alchemical tarot' theory in mind when composing this book, the problem is that the format and order of the sets of picture concept-symbols does not fit any known modern understanding of tarot. At the same time, in order to decipher any kind of underlying tarot-like structure to the Splendor Solis you would have to be both an expert in tarot and in advanced alchemy ... and there have ever been few such individuals. Certainly almost none in existence in our time.

ESSAY SEVENTY-SIX

Book Discussion - Rosarium Philosophorum

Rosarium Philosophorum - Arnold De Villanova

The authorship of this book is generally attributed to Arnold De Villanova (1240–1311), although at least one modern commentator insists that De Villanova had nothing to do with the publication. Personally I think that is possibly accurate.

After Ripley's Bosome Book the Rosarium is definitely my favorite alchemical text. Although 'text' is not really an apt label, because originally the Rosarium Philosophorum was very likely another 'mutus liber' (silent book), because the original was likely only woodcut pictographs, with no text. Nevertheless some researchers believe the original version came with a small amount of German text-commentary (which I have shown in my version, attached). This too is quite possible.

The first appearance of The Rosarium Philosophorum, which has survived to our time, was in a book called De Alchemia Opuscula complura veterum Philosophorum ... published in Frankfort in 1550. That publication was divided in two parts, and the book called The Rosarium Philosophorum made up the second part.

When we look at the original version of the Rosarium, in old-print Latin, we notice it is composed of three types of information. A set of 21 woodcut pictures, and the original printer has used two different main fonts in the text. Just underneath (or just after), some of the pictures is a classic German font, in German language. But the bulk of the rest of the text is classic Roman font, in Medieval Latin. The woodcut picture that is on the title page was added later, so was not part of the original collection of 20 woodcuts. The cover picture

shows a group of philosophers arguing about how to produce the philosopher's stone ... and this relates to the Latin text in Roman characters that was added later to the original woodcuts (and possibly the German text), which is largely a collection of sayings attributed to various famous alchemists. This same kind of format was also used in the famous book *The Turba Philosophorum* (The Gathering of the Philosophers). So this later editing of the *Rosarium* looks to be a kind of 'trendy' format for alchemical books that were often slapped together by non-chemists, often just publishers, in order to make money. Although undoubtedly some actual alchemists made use of this 'Turba-type' format too.

Since it is believed that the title page (and its woodcut), was added to the original woodcuts, later, we might also guess that possibly the title of the book, too, was a later addition ... "The Rosary of the Philosophers". If we remove these later additions (the title page and the Latin text), we are left with 20 woodcuts and the German text that is found under, or after, some of the woodcuts, which I believe is the original document.

Like many of these alchemical 'picture books' some of the themes in the *Rosarium* pictures were borrowed from earlier publications (or MSS). So the overall theme of the *Rosarium* is not unique, but is part of a specific school of alchemical thought and practice. Part of the theme of this particular school was to present the process of lab alchemy as a philosophic model of Christian idealism. As we can see clearly that some of the pictures in the *Rosarium* series are blatantly Christian, and trinitarian. In this Christian theme the idea is to make a comparison between the story of Christ's life, and the production of the Philosopher's Stone.

Of course, one of the reasons I like this book is because it is obviously a depiction of the acetate path. We can tell this is the case because of the 1st and the 18th woodcuts, which show the

destructive distillation glyph and the green lion respectively. Both are blatant icons of the acetate path.

The next thing I really like about the Rosarium is that it tells its story very simply. Its pictures are in no way over burdened with complex symbolism. But instead its story revolves around the central theme that almost the entire alchemical process is an interplay between two conditions, which tradition refers to as the 'King' and the 'Queen'. (The Hieros Gamos or sacred wedding). I believe that in trying to understand and solve the alchemical enigma, looking at the puzzle from this angle is the most productive approach.

After that the thing I love about the Rosarium is that first woodcut ... the Mercurial Fountain of the Alchemists. For me that one picture is the most interesting and beautifully crafted symbol amid all of the alchemical iconography. It is precise and detailed, and once we recognise what it is depicting, we can't misunderstand what the Rosarium is trying to tell us. We know without a shadow of a doubt that whoever designed this series of woodcuts was trained in the path that begins with the destructive distillation of organic matter. In other words, the author was a proponent of the Lullian school of alchemy.

This too is very important because of the age of this text. The earliest version of it comes to us from 1550, 300 years after alchemy was first introduced into Europe, and smack bang right in the middle of the Medieval period ... the time, I believe, where the most common core technique in the Great Work in Germany, France, Spain and Britain was the acetate path. The preferred approach by the Catholic monastic alchemists of that period in particular. This is the stream of alchemic tradition that gave us the Esoteric Fraternity system, and the Rosicrucian Order in particular.

At the same time, again, this esoteric monastic tradition near the dawn of alchemy in the Western tradition, displays the fact

that the way these alchemists understood the process was extremely simple. 20 very, very, basic glyphs in which to describe the entire process of the Great Work.

Another thing I like about the Rosarium is the fact that its core theme, the manipulation of the male and female poles of the Stone, ended up in the Rider-Waite Tarot, in the 6th major arcana, the lovers. I think this is a testament to the idea that Waite really wanted the Tarot to be alchemical, overall. Bits and pieces of the Rosarium symbolism have ended up in many different publications all over the place. So something in us recognises the archetypal symbolism inherent in this text.

Another important point to recognise about the Rosarium is the order of its woodcuts. They are out of sequence. We already know the path this book describes is the acetate path. If we understand the acetate path we know what the Green Lion is ... it is the Prima Materia, which appears at the early stage of the work. But in the Rosarium the glyph representing the Green Lion is shown in the 18th place in the order of pictures, right near the end. From this we know that at least two of the woodcuts are out of place, and likely many more. It also tells us that this mixing up of the woodcuts would mean that the accompanying text is also likely to be confused. Making deciphering the overall text a complicated problem.

Of the Latin text itself, a book set up in the format of a discussion between Philosophers is designed on the basis of the idea that the author is insinuating that all of these individuals are discussing the same path to the Stone, and agree on the same usage of language and concepts. We are often told that one of the tricks to discovering the truth in alchemy is to read many authors and to compare their teachings, and then to extract out of that overview the things they all agree upon. So whoever compiled the Latin text section of the Rosarium was attempting to carry out this work of comparison for us ... or at least appear to be doing so. But the

reality is that it is hard to tell if every saying attributed to these men is a real or an accurate quote. At the same time some of the individuals cannot be identified, so could possibly be inventions of the author's choosing.

Find attached a version of the Rosarium which I have compiled for this forum. The base-text was taken from the English translation that appeared in 1588 (Lubeck). But I have edited this English translation in an attempt to try and format it as close to the original Latin version (1550) as I could. There are some differences between the English and Latin versions though. Some text is missing or has been added to the English translation. Not a lot, but enough to notice if you look close.

ESSAY SEVENTY-SEVEN

Book Discussion - Atalanta Fugiens

Atalanta Fugiens - Michael Maier

(Atalanta Fugiens - The Fleeing Atalanta)

Ok, so two book reviews on my list to go, and Atalanta Fugiens is first. Most of us will know this work was published in Latin, written by the well-known alchemist Michael Maier, in 1617.

The entire work is a collection of 50 engravings with various pieces of text, divided mostly between epigrams (poetic verses) and discourses (vague explanations of the engravings). The engravings are accompanied by a musical score for each engraving. This musical aspect makes this text unique in the canon of alchemical texts, and scholars like to wax lyrically about this aspect of the work, but as someone else already said here, for the most part the music is not going to win any awards.

The discourses run on a theme which is not uncommon in philosophic-style alchemical texts. That theme is one where the idea that the stories of ancient mythology contain alchemical secrets. Maier presents this theme by making comparisons between alchemical processes and mainly Roman and Greek mythological themes. This theme is found firstly in the title of the work 'Atalanta Fugiens' (meaning - The Fleeing Atalanta). Atalanta is a figure from Greek mythology. A virgin huntress who wanted to remain single, but was loved by the Greek hero Meleager. So by relation to this idea we see a common idea in alchemical mythology, usually referred to Diana (the huntress), appearing as the main character of the theme. Diana was considered by many alchemists to be the patroness of alchemy.

It is curious to note that in some versions of the quest for the Golden Fleece, Atalanta sailed with the Argonauts as the only female among them. Most of us will be aware that the story of the Golden Fleece has long been considered by alchemists to be an alchemical cypher.

The 'fleeing' of Atalanta probably refers to part of her legend where she told her father she would only marry a man who could beat her in a foot race.

I think for most students of alchemy the thing most attractive about Atalanta Fugiens is the artwork in the engravings (or is that just my bias as an artist?). Among the many collections of alchemical artwork the 50 engravings of Atalanta Fugiens are some of the most skillfully drawn, and most interesting in symbolism.

I've said previously that in my opinion trying to use books which are based on artwork as a source of information on a specific path to the Stone is often pointless. I certainly believe that for the most part Atalanta Fugiens falls in to this category too. The artwork alone tells us almost nothing. It is largely composed of a collection of symbols taken from earlier alchemical engravings, or common ideas from earlier alchemy converted into picture-form. It's accompanying poetic verses are the same, very vague. Also the discourses on each engraving are not much different. It is not easy to even tell what path this book describes. Sections of it look to be unarguably the acetate path. Blatant acetate path symbolism continues right through the entire book, and can be seen most notably in the title text of Emblem 37, which reads ...

"Three things are sufficient for the Magistry: The White Fume that is Water;

The Green Lion that is the Bra's of Hermes; and Aqua Faetida."

The White Fume, the Green Lion and the Stinking Water are all concepts belonging to the acetate path.

But we also see symbols such as those in the 24th Emblem (engraving) where a Wolf is devouring a King. This is most often touted by the followers of the path of the Regulus to be a symbol of Antimony refining Gold. The 'Grey Wolf' said to be the symbol of Antimony. This symbol, as far as I know, does not appear anywhere in the texts of those authors who were part of the Lullian tradition, at the heart of the acetate path. So it is possible that *Atalanta Fugiens* is a text describing the acetate path, but including symbols that were not originally part of that tradition. Or, that *Atalanta Fugiens* is based on theory alone, and that theory uses a confused set of symbol pulled together by the author. Or that the work is simply a fake, compiled very untidily from various conflicting sources at an attempt to look authentic.

Personally, I believe that if Maier was indeed the author of this text, that he was an acetate path alchemist, but that he told his story in this book based on a later evolution of the acetate path symbolism, and/or a system of working the acetate process that included techniques that were possibly not part of the original Lullian teaching.

Among the 50 Emblems of *Atalanta Fugiens* my favorites are Emblem 19, which shows an old man eating Golden Apples from the Tree of Life amid the Garden of Hesperides. For some alchemists this Garden was a symbol of the community of the Adepts, and the knowledge they together possessed. I also very much like Emblem 27, which shows a student of alchemy attempting to open the Gate into the Garden of Hesperides, whereat he is told that without the Key to that Gate he simply won't get in. I like this symbol because it tells us that 'initiation' is the key to the Garden (reading that engraving as a symbol from the inner tradition). We can also see the student of

alchemy standing in a 'stream', and this stream originates at the base of a small Mountain in the background, around which sit a group of Adepts. This stream flows 'in' to the Gate. In other words, 'knowledge' (the Key) of the nature of this Gate is preserved and handed on by the Hermetic Adept tradition.

The final emblem I like is the 45th engraving. It shows the Sun, the Earth, the Moon and the Sun's Shadow being cast upon the belt of Stars, a group of which are visible 'at night'. This emblem tells us about the most important secret of the first stage of the Great Work, which is putrefaction. The entire secret is tied up in an understanding of the symbol of the Shadow (the Sun at night), and the nature of those celestial bodies that 'appear' in the 'Hermetic Sky' at night. The artist and author of this engraving is telling us in a way that only an initiated Adept could recognise, that he himself holds this Key and has entered in through The First Gate. So, in a manner, a secret message is encoded in what, for all intents and purposes, looks like a very bland and unimportant astrological diagram.

ESSAY SEVENTY-EIGHT

Book Discussion - Am Duat

AMDUAT

(What is in the Otherworld)

The Book of The Hidden Chamber
(Or the Twelve Hours of the Night
and the Midnight Mystery)

ca. 1426 BCE

So now let's get in to the last book review I was asked to give. This isn't really going to be a book review, but more an explanation of the chief concepts described in the Ancient Egyptian Book of the AmDuat. The AmDuat is not really a book. But certainly books have been written about it, and at one time in its history it was referred to as a book. Historically the oldest versions we have of this document are murals painted on the sarcophagus chamber walls of some of the Ancient Egyptian Kings.

AmDuat is the anglicized translation of an Egyptian term commonly referred to as 'The Underworld' or Afterlife. It might more accurately be called 'The Magical Universe' or the Unconscious Mind.

The ancient Egyptian priests had a very interesting view of the structure of reality. They took the period of time between sunrise and sunset and divided it in to 12 parts, and between sunset and sunrise and divided that in to 12 parts too. This is the origin of the 24 hour clock we use today. But in ancient Egypt for only two days of the year were the 12 divisions of day and night equal, and that was at the two solar equinoxes. It wasn't until around 147BC in Hellenistic Egypt that the 24 hours

were fixed by the Greeks at equal portions for the entire 24 hour period.

The Egyptian priests referred to the daytime 12 hours as the waking world, and the nighttime portion of 12 hours as the Duat. Euphemistically they said that the sun (Ra) traversed the heaven in his boat of the sun, moving through the 12 periods of day. Then at dusk the boat of the sun would sink in the west, and enter the Duat (night), and traverse the 12 hours of the night, or 12 divisions of the Duat.

This practice of dividing reality into day-night with 12 divisions in each can be looked at from four different perspectives, each of which is related. The first perspective is to recognise the system as astronomical. The division of a single rotation of Earth into day and night and 24 divisions. The second perspective is psychological, that the 'daytime' is our waking conscious life, and 'nighttime' is when we are asleep and unconscious. The third perspective is incarnatory. The day period representing our incarnate life, and the night period our afterlife, between death and rebirth. The fourth perspective is the initiatory one. Where daytime represents common life, and nighttime represents the journey of the initiate.

The key concept in understanding these perspectives is to recognise that 'Ra' symbolises awareness (the conscious state of mind), and that to the ancient Egyptian priest initiates Ra was conscious in the day (experiencing khem), and conscious in the night (experiencing the duat).

The section of Ra's journey that the Egyptian priests were of course most interested in were the 12 divisions of the Duat. In some vastly remote period of human existence some enterprising occultists traveled consciously into the Duat (the mind-world), and recorded what they experienced there. Over a vast period of time a large and deeply serious body of knowledge was accumulated about the structure and function of

the mind-world. At the core of this body of knowledge was the concept that the mind was not simply a place where thinking, imagination and dreaming went on, but in fact it was a world in its own right, just as the waking world is. Albeit a world very unlike the waking world. Nevertheless it had its own 'landscape', was governed by its own natural laws, and was also populated by intelligent beings.

Over a period of generations of initiates who were carefully trained to enter, observe and experience the Duat, some deeply important pieces of information about its nature were discovered and held as most serious secrets. Among these secrets was a knowledge of the fact that the waking world was governed by forces in the Duat. Also, that in a specific section of the Duat there was a special 'enclosure' of sorts where the sentient and advancing soul was reborn or regenerated. The initiates who investigated this enclosure also discovered that for a certain portion of people the effect this place had on them was to illuminate them.

In general terms this enclosure was simply called 'The Chamber' and what happened in there, for the initiate, was referred to as 'The Midnight Mystery', because the chamber existed right next to the hour of midnight in the Duat, during Ra's journey.

The section of the Duat where this highly esoteric activity occurred was in the '5th Hour' (or 5th division) of the Duat. Which you can see reproduced in one of the attached pictures.

The entire region of the Duat is pictured as having three horizontal layers. We can see these easily in the 5th Hour diagram. On the top layer we can see various gods and other symbols, and in the middle of that layer is a small mound atop of which sits a perch. This mound is the symbol of the place where the divine Horus came to rest at the creation of the world. On each side of the mound are the falcons which

symbolise Isis and Nephtys, and we can see the symbol of Kephra, the scarab, the reborn sun, poking down below the mound grasping the tow rope which is attached to the boat of Ra, which we see to the left of the middle section of the 5th Hour.

In the middle of the middle section we can see a kind of rough pyramid-like structure, which has a human head at its summit. This actually represents the idea of the pyramid itself as the covering of the place of death and rebirth. We notice in old Egyptian texts a King who was building a pyramid was always identified with his pyramid, as if the pyramid contained him, or symbolised him.

Now the interesting part. In the lowest section of the 5th hour we can clearly see 'The Chamber'. The chamber is shown inside and below the pyramid. This chamber had a very specific title ... the Chamber of (the god) Sokar (aka: Seker). The god Sokar was a falcon headed human, and his role was guardian of the necropolis (grave yard) at Giza (where the bulk of the best pyramids can be seen).

In the lower section of the 5th hour we can see Sokar standing inside a kind of lozenge shaped enclosure (a sarcophagus), standing on the back of a three headed winged serpent, holding its wings. Sokar here represents the resurrected soul, rising from the tomb. A sarcophagus which is curiously egg-like.

The symbolism here, although archaic, is not hard to grasp.

In the 11th Hour we can see where all of this is leading. In the top section, to the left, we can see a small group of curious pictograms. To one side we see a two-headed person with the symbol for the sun between the heads. The two heads are wearing one each of the crowns of upper and lower Egypt. But the heads are facing away from each other ... a symbol of

binary awareness. Beside this two-headed person we see a cool vignette of a man standing over a winged serpent (similar to Sokar in the chamber of resurrection). On his head he has the symbol of the sun (solar consciousness), flanked by two eyes. The entire vignette forms a symbolic image of the human head ... two eyes, the man representing the nose, and the serpent the mouth. The serpents wings form the cheeks or sides of the face. The solar orb, now, is placed squarely between the eyes, at the position traditionally attributed to the third eye and anatomically to the pineal gland.

On the right of this collection of symbols we see a man seated on a serpent which is rising up toward a set of ten stars. A set of stars like this is usually understood to represent a star-gate.

The collective symbolism of this set is also quite clear. It represents the condition of the resurrected initiate, in the hour before the final hour which leads to sunrise ... the 'Golden Dawn' or Aurora of the Philosophers. Which we can see in the 12th hour, where the Scarab Kephra pushes the head and shoulders of the reborn initiate through the Eastern Gate, toward the Sunrise.

What we see in the Book of the AmDuat is really a symbolic map of the mind-world. Generations of knowledge about what the Duat is has been encoded into this diagram, which would have likely been used both as a mnemonic-coded teaching tool, as well as an instruction device used during initiations. For this diagram is obviously 'specifically' a diagram of the process of initiation. The means of using what is contained in the mind-world to exalt human consciousness.

As a curious side note, the indigenous people of New Zealand, the Maori, had a highly secretive priest caste who were trained in high magic, called the 'Tohunga' (toh-hong-ah). While the average person worshiped a pantheon of

departmental gods, the Tohunga secretly worshiped a single God whom they referred to as Io. Io, tradition asserts, not only created and rules over the everyday world, but also over the 'Po' (which translates as the region of night), or underworld, which was divided by the Tohunga in to 12 sections, and where the initiated Tohunga student had to pass through in order to complete his training.

The 'cult of Io' (as it has been called by Europeans) was so secretive that the common Maori, outside of the ranks of the highest Tohunga initiates, never knew what the Tohunga taught, and had never heard of Io, until the first European missionaries came to NZ in the late 1700s. Apparently the old Tohunga decided to reveal the nature of their Mystery tradition once they studied Christian teaching, and realised the teachings of the Io mystery tradition were almost identical to Old Testament Judaism. So the old Maori Tohunga were secretly preserving an esoteric teaching which was very similar to the esoteric traditions found in the ancient Middle East.

A good reference on this subject of the Duat can be found here ...

<http://maat.sofiatopia.org/amduat.htm>

ESSAY SEVENTY-NINE

Tarot - Part 1

Ok, so here we finally get to the subject of the tarot. I decided to discuss this subject in essay format for a couple of reasons. Firstly, because we had already touched on the subject earlier (in reference to my own designing of a tarot deck), and a couple of people showed interest in understanding more about my approach to designing a deck. Secondly, because I think most Western occultists at one time or other become interested in tarot and make at least a reasonable effort to research ideas about what tarot is and where it comes from. I also think many occultists who like tarot privately have an image in their mind of their ideal tarot deck.

So let me begin, here, by looking at what my personal ideas are about what tarot is, and where it comes from, before I start discussing my approach to design.

I think most people who have looked into the alleged origins of tarot have come across the most common popular attitude that modern tarot began its life as some kind of a picture-based esoteric teaching system in ancient Egypt. I personally don't believe that claim for a moment. There simply is no serious evidence to suggest it might be true. The common story is that the Egyptian God Thoth created a picture-book which contained a series of symbolic pictures, which, together, contained in abstract symbolic format the entire wisdom of Hermetic teaching. Cool idea, but, again, in my opinion there is no evidence to suggest that such a book ever existed (physically). Having said that I should point out that while I don't believe a book existed that was a series of picture-lessons on the entire canon of Hermetic teaching, I do believe the ancient Egyptians taught Hermetic wisdom using symbolic picture format. Their

temples are obviously a monument to the deep and complex reality of this fact.

What we do know historically about the origins of tarot is that around the mid-15th century sets of hand painted decks of cards turned up, which were known to be used to play a bunch of recreational games. These decks of cards were known by various names, all of which were sort of variations of the word 'tarot' (sort of). No proof exists today that these decks of cards were originally used for divination, or to teach esoteric knowledge. But ... it is quite obvious when we look at the titles some of the individual cards were given, that the theme of the decks was to some degree attached to (or related to) ... what at that time was ... conventional education. That is, some of the cards had titles like 'arithmetic' and 'astronomy' and 'rhetoric'. So the concept of the seven liberal arts and sciences were part of the theme of some part of the early tarot. But this is in no way to be considered esoteric, since in the 15th century this would have been no different than if today someone invented a card game where part of the theme of the cards was a list of courses taught at a local university.

So while it is kinda fun and cool to invent faerie stories about mystical books containing magical wisdom, this kind of fantasy entertainment does more to obscure the probable facts than it does to reveal the truth. I personally feel the probable truth is far more interesting than the faerie stories.

In this way, in order to understand my view of what tarot was, and how it became what it is today, it helps to understand that I believe that at its beginning tarot was a quite innocent popular recreational game object. And possibly also played some kind of very basic educational role. That whoever came up with the concept had no esoteric (and certainly not Hermetic) intention at all.

Now, I have discussed the concept previously that within the unconscious mind there is a vast storehouse of information about the structure and function of reality. The anima mundi, or memory of the universe. It retains all of the data about what the universe is, how it got here, and where it is going. I've also said that it is the nature of this nature-information database that it likes to push ideas it contains out into physical reality, so that we might become consciously aware of these ideas. I have also described how this 'expose' process most readily happens through various kinds of artwork ... such as paintings, books and especially today ... movies.

When an idea first emerges from the collective unconscious, into the collective conscious, through the agency of some artist (for example), grasping the thought as it rises to the surface of the human mind, it is highly likely that the artist himself may not be aware of what it is that he is revealing. Or, that he reveals this new idea only partially, or inaccurately, at first. This is because, naturally, the idea is just emerging from the 'unconscious', and so to some degree it will likely remain unrecognised, even while sitting right out in the open in a book, painting or movie.

It would take a highly developed mind to grasp a newly emerging idea, realise it is a new idea, as well as express that idea in some kind of media ... in its fullest expression, accurately the first time. In many instances when an idea newly emerging from the unconscious is grasped by an artist sufficiently developed to recognise it and express it in a work of art, it might take decades or even centuries before another mind arrives on the scene and upon seeing the original artwork, recognise more accurately that which the unconscious is attempting to express.

So the above concept forms the ground plan of my opinion about what tarot really is. I believe that the original individual who grasped the idea of the tarot did so imperfectly. He (or she)

simply grasped the concept of a set of cards depicting archetypal ideas, in a somewhat symbolic format, and then presented this basic theme in the guise of a game. But I also believe that this idea (the tarot), was a newly emerging idea from deep in the collective unconscious ... the idea that the mind is composed of a set of structural conditions and functions, and that these structures and functions can be represented by symbols, which in turn can be depicted in an orderly fashion on a set of cards. I also believe that it took about another 200 years before some occult-inclined individual grasped a more accurate view of the idea that this is what the tarot should be, and designed the first esoteric tarot deck. I believe, also, that this first strictly esoteric deck (the first deck deliberately designed to be a set of symbols representing the key concepts of the nature of the structure and function of reality), was also an inaccurate design. It was a good attempt at trying to express the idea residing in the unconscious, but as yet it was imperfectly executed.

Since that point in time where the first deliberately esoteric deck was designed, we have then seen a progressive number of attempts at trying to more accurately express the unconscious concept of a picture-book describing the key structure-function of reality, evolve increasingly toward a more perfect expression of that idea.

Finally, because (I believe), the original concept that exists in the unconscious, upon which the tarot is based, is basically a 'plan' of the key structures and functions of the nature of reality ... then by its very nature the 'flavour' of the perfected tarot design would be alchemical ... since the real nature of reality ... that is, its structure and function ... is an alchemical mechanism.

In this way, for me, this is the starting point of any attempt at trying to more accurately express (in design), what the tarot is attempting to evolve in to.

ESSAY EIGHTY

Tarot - Part 2

Tarot and Living Systems Theory

In my previous introduction to the idea of Tarot I described how I believe that the central theme which Tarot is trying to depict is a series of symbol-pictures which describe the core principles of the structure and function of reality. Here, I am going to look at that idea more closely.

Hermetics teaches the idea that our reality is designed based on a small number of key 'bits'. Since tarot has evolved in to an esoteric picture-book it has developed in to a system attempting to define these core principles upon which reality is based. At the same time tarot is attempting to show that there are relationships that exist between these individual principles which are deeply esoteric.

Tarot is designed in such a way that it depicts reality as being constructed from 78 general reality functions and conditions, within which there are 22 key functions and conditions which govern the nature of reality. We must remember that the original tarot didn't start off like this. The original tarot had different numbers of cards, but over the centuries that the structure of tarot has been evolving, this new tarot card number has developed.

When I look at the idea of what the tarot is trying to grow in to, the very first concept I begin with is that it is trying to present a picture of the most basic principles from which reality is built. If this is the case then for me the most basic principles from which reality is constructed are the 'pieces' of an alchemical clockwork mechanism. That is, at the very heart of what reality is, is a mechanism which functions on the basis of alchemical

dynamics. As I have discussed in detail elsewhere, the study of alchemy is the study of this clockwork mechanism that lies at the very core of reality.

In this way, if tarot is an attempt at trying to depict the structure and function of this 'reality machine', then tarot would be, by its very nature, an alchemical concept. So this is curious because anyone who has studied tarot will likely know that the biggest selling (and therefore most popular), tarot deck is the Rider-Waite deck, which is overtly (although rudimentary) alchemical in its theme.

The second concept that motivates the direction I think in about tarot is a thing called 'living systems theory'. Living systems theory was first established by a gentleman by the name of James Grier Miller. He encapsulated his ideas about living systems in a large text that he simply titled 'Living Systems'.

If we begin from the idea that tarot is essentially an alchemical concept, then we must also be open to the fact that alchemy teaches that all things are 'alive'. So any book that describes an alchemical world view is going to be talking about reality as a collection of living systems, existing in a kind of nested hierarchy.

Curiously enough, in James Grier Miller's living systems theory he presents the idea that all living systems in nature are built upon twenty "critical subsystems". That is, all living systems contain twenty basic structure-functions ... whether those living systems are single cells, complex biological organisms, institutions, countries or societies, for example.

The fact that tarot and James Grier Miller's living systems theory have evolved in isolation from each other, and contain almost an identical concept at their core ... that all living systems are based on 20-ish basic function-conditions, is a very

curious thing. On this basis it is my belief that James Grier Miller's systems theory is a highly technical description of one of the aspects of nature that tarot is attempting to describe, itself. In his book on living systems James Grier Miller describes what these 20 critical subsystems are, and a close look at these subsystems is quite surprising.

Miller tells us that all living systems contain three types of condition ... which he calls 'matter', 'energy' and 'information'. You should immediately be aware of where you've heard of that triad of ideas before. He then groups these three essential conditions in to three groups ... those which process matter–energy, those which process information, and the first two, which process both matter–energy and information. Then he lists the subsystems for each of these three sets, thus:

Processors of matter-energy and information:

1. The reproducer
2. The boundary

The processors of matter–energy are:

3. The ingestor
4. The distributor
5. The converter
6. The producer
7. Storage
8. The extruder
9. The motor
10. The supporter

The processors of information are

11. The input transducer
12. The internal transducer
13. The channel and net
14. The timer (added later)
15. The decoder
16. The associator

17. Memory
18. The decider
19. The encoder
20. The output transducer.

Here, in Miller's living systems theory, then, we have a scientific description of the essential function of each of the tarot major arcana. We might call the labels which Miller gave to the subsystems, the scientific labels for the major arcana.

Now, the third and final concept which I base my approach to tarot on. If tarot is indeed a description of the most basic pieces of the reality machine, then in 'life' every possible thing which can happen to us must be the result of the combination of the interaction of these 22 or 20 basic subsystems (major arcana). In other words, tarot divination is an attempt at reading the possible outcomes of the interaction of these subsystems in our lives. (Just how that is possible I will discuss elsewhere).

In this way, tarot can serve as a text for studying, discussing and teaching alchemy and living systems theory. It can also be used to divine possible future events, or to divine an esoteric understanding of past or present events.

So, if my basic thesis here is accurate ... that tarot is an evolving concept, which is developing into a means of describing the basic structure and function of living systems, then the first task in designing a truly alchemical tarot is to identify which major arcana cards go with which living systems subsystem titles.

Once that task is complete, with Miller's Living Systems Theory you will then have the beginning of the most serious and scientific hermetic tarot system yet devised. A major leap forward in the evolution of tarot.

ESSAY EIGHTY-ONE

Tarot - Part 3

Tarot - as a resource for studying, discussing and teaching alchemy.

Continuing my discourse on tarot, and my approach to designing a tarot deck ...

So my first consideration is that tarot should be primarily alchemical in nature, because it describes the structure and function of reality. This then brings me to my next consideration when designing a tarot deck. That is, that an alchemical tarot deck should bring together, in to one system, the following functions:

(1) The Formula

Before anything else, when I lay out a properly designed alchemical tarot deck, I want to be able to see in its design the actual formula of the Great Work. That means I could look at the deck and recognise each step, in order ... take this substance here, that substance there, and do this and that to them, where I will get this here and that there as products, to which I will then do this and that. I want to see the equipment required and the chemicals used.

Any tarot deck that claims to be alchemical that does not contain an alchemical formula symbolically represented, is not alchemical. Period. So I want an alchemical tarot that I can literally use as a text book to teach the lab process from. The immediate problem with attempting to design an alchemical tarot, then, is that in order to fulfill this first requirement you have to first know the full, accurate, formula.

(2) The unity of the Inner and Outer Works.

At the same time that such a tarot deck could be used as a textbook to teach the lab process, it should also be able to be read in a way that you can also easily see the inner process graphically and symbolically explained. In this way it would also be a lesson in showing how the inner and the outer works are really one and the same thing. From this point of view a common set of symbols and images would be used to describe both aspects of the work.

Before anything else an alchemical tarot should contain both of these first two requirements.

(3) Qabala

Basic and essential Hermetic qabala must be neatly integrated into the design, in such a way that the tarot can be used to teach it. For me this factor comes as a very close requirement along with the first two considerations. This Hermetic qabala should also be represented in as secular-a-fashion as possible without stripping away its esoteric function. That is, it should be stripped of as much cultural and religio-political orthodoxy as possible.

(4) Unification of the various other primary aspects of Hermetic Science.

Similarly, such a tarot deck should include, along with lab, inner alchemy and qabala, a neatly integrated depiction of astrology, divination and ritual. Symbols for each of these aspects of Hermetism should be combined into an harmonious whole. Showing how all of these presently separate sciences are in fact facets of one Hermetic world view. This is a common aspect of modern tarot that has often been designed along the pseudo-golden dawn line, but the accuracy of present thinking along these lines is questionable. For me personally, though, this aspect of tarot is simply a curiosity, and not essential to a well formed alchemical tarot.

(4) Educational structure.

Such a tarot deck should also present and define the structure of a proper Hermetic educational system. The ranks, degrees and quality of the educational structure should be clearly recognised, complete, and presented in a way that it fits neatly with the alchemical formula. This, for me, is a very important aspect of tarot. What use is a system of knowledge if no clear and productive teaching system accompanies it? So the way in which Hermetism is taught is just as important as the information that is taught.

(5) History

Such a tarot deck should also describe, as best as possible, the relative history of alchemy, and how it unfolded. What is a tree without roots?

As for the artwork itself, I believe (presently) that it should be a combination of three styles. Firstly, it should contain an air of tradition. That is, the main style of the artwork should in some fashion be classical or ancient. In order to present and invoke a feel of tradition. Secondly, it should be loaded with the accurate use of classic Hermetic glyph-symbols. This to some degree is necessary in order to pack as much information in to each card as is necessary to fulfill the first five requirements, listed above. It also lends to a more accurate recollection of information, as well as presenting the concept that this deck is an object of science as much as an object of art.

The artwork should also accurately contain versions of pictures that have already been widely used in alchemio-Hermetic literature historically. That is, it is far more aesthetically pleasing to see a deck which contains iconographic alchemical images that can be easily identified with by the educated reader.

It will of course be necessary, to a degree, to form such a tarot deck to include some of the information in a cryptic (less obvious) format. If the reader of the deck comes to its study

with the understanding that it is a complete body of traditional knowledge, then even the cryptic information could be drawn out of a study of the deck as an object of meditation. In this way the deck itself is not only a textbook, in the esoteric-academic view, but also is an object of a practical meditative kind, taking up its own role in the process of the initiatory experience.

In my last part of this essay set on tarot I will look at the essential underlying structure that I am working on as the basis for integrating all these ideas in to one pictographic system.

ESSAY EIGHTY-TWO

Tarot - Part 4

Tarot - as a map of Hermetic Training

In my previous essay on tarot I described that which I believe to be the necessary basic considerations when setting out to design an alchemical tarot deck (the major arcana, particularly). Here I am going to describe the present ground-plan I am working on which I believe is the most productive template for such a scheme.

So it is important to keep in mind, here, that this template is a work in progress, something I've been thinking about and tweaking for about 20 years, and I still have a bunch of tweaking yet to do. But it is a good example of how my thought process works in relation to this subject.

Find attached a file that shows in diagram form the fundamental concepts about the major arcana format, in relation to the layer of tarot symbolism which describes the ideal Hermetic training scheme. I'll explain some parts of this diagram, briefly, just to make the underlying concepts a little more clear.

To begin, when considering the initiatory scheme, the diagram is read from the top-down first, then from left-to-right. The cards are laid out not in the traditional format which is composed of three rows of seven cards each. That scheme is ok, but it is by far too superficial and conceals more than it reveals. I have laid the cards out in seven rows, based on a four-card 'set' for each row, plus the first and last cards as single units. This layout is far more alchemical because it is based on two fundamental concepts ... the four Elements as

they develop through seven stages of growth. So in the first instance it shows how the Elements relate to the 'planets'.

The first card (the fool) represents the crude matter which the alchemist takes in hand to begin the great work. In the initiatory scheme (the inner work), this of course refers to the person seeking initiation. This individual exists at the 'luna' level. That is, he (or she) lives life primarily governed by unconscious impulses ... a half asleep fool.

Once that individual is accepted for training as an Hermetic initiate, he takes on the status shown by 'the magician' card. Such a person comes to the process of initiation primarily from the angle of seeing it as an intellectual pursuit, and a desire to rule over outer life by force of arms (using magic to get his way). Hence, this card and stage of training is represented by the planet mercury ... which represents lower intellectual reason. Curiously enough, the old Adepts labelled this card 'the magician', which says a lot about modern mainstream occultism.

During the first stage of training represented by this first row of four cards we see the steps in training which must be attained by the novice. The intellectually (ruach) bias student must first be taught how to manage operating in the magical universe (the subconscious), represented by the 'high priestess' (nephesh). He must set aside his 'thinking' bias approach, and take up the 'being' approach.

Once the student has learned the proper technique for operating in this inner environment, that then leads to the next stage, the forging of a link with the higher functions, the first intelligence of which is neschamah (the empress). Immediately after the student has succeeded in that step, a link is then forged with chiah (the emperor), at which stage the student now has separated-out the four Elements of his psyche, and formed

a relationship with all four of the prime intelligences who are the expression of those Elements in the mind.

This last 'Element', represented by the emperor, is the chiah, the 'inner alchemist' ... who now activates the stage of the work where the separated Elements will be purified. We understand that as the inner alchemist the chiah governs the purifying fire of the alchemist's athanor.

Once the student has reached that point, he has naturally made the transition from 'novice' (new student), to 'adept' (experienced student). He has learned all the basic operating techniques, knows the territory, and knows the ground plan for seeking out and learning from the four prime archetypes that govern his human mind. Because he has achieved a degree of expert familiarity with all these ideas, he is now often in a position to be able to teach the 'novice' level of training to any newly accepted initiate.

If he takes on the role of teacher (the hierophant), himself, he still has his own work to deal with, because his journey is far from complete. Now that he has found, separated and analysed the four Elements of his nature, his next task is to begin the process of attempting to reunite them. The 'solve' is complete, now to coagula must follow. This row of cards is governed by the planet venus, which the GD rightfully tells us is the doorway in to the secret vault of the Adepti.

This next stage is described in 'the lovers' card. This reuniting (our chymical wedding), is first focused on nephesch and ruach, whom we see depicted in the lovers card. This process, in the mind, is governed over by neschamah, who is depicted as an angel above ruach and nephesch. We should remember that neschamah translates into English as 'understanding' ... and it is by gaining 'understanding' of the structure and function of one's own mind, that the divisions

which keep the mind binary and in conflict, are beginning to be harmonised and healed.

This harmonising, piece-by-piece, as 'understanding' (neshamah) is brought into the lower mind, begins to awaken the higher genius, in the awareness of the lower self (since the higher genius is the personification of all unity) ... and this step is depicted in the 'chariot' card. The archetype riding the chariot is the higher genius. The two sphinxes symbolise the ruach and nephesch, which the advancing Adept now begins to realise are 'ridden' (controlled) by the higher genius.

As this realisation unfolds more potentially in the Adept's life, and he is forced to accept that in fact he himself is not in control, but instead the higher genius is ... he now knows the secret to freedom is gained through understanding ... the antithesis to ignorance ... and this acceptance is pictured in the 'strength' card, which shows neschamah (understanding), gaining control over the lower beast nature (the lion). This acceptance (more than a simple intellectual grasping of an idea), begins a new transition in the student's status on the royal road. He now slowly realises and learns that mastery of the game of life is found in ruthlessly gaining understanding ... and thus, he becomes a magister templi (master of the temple of life).

That degree of mastery is depicted in the 'hermit' card, where the student now stands upon the summit of the invisible mountain of initiation. In his hand he holds the light of the higher functions ... in other words, he knows the secret of how the higher functions rule lower life, and how a person can access that state of existence.

Once the student has attained the 'hermit' (or 'hermet') state, he has a full grasp of the nature of the secret R.O.T.A. of the old rosicrucians ... the alchemical mechanism of nature the mastery of which brings 'fortune', and is thus euphemistically

referred to as the 'wheel of fortune'. It is the invisible alchemical clockwork of nature.

An individual who understands what this rota is, and how it works, discovers how to stop living a life that encourages binary existence. Once the master of life knows how to stop producing more 'bad karma', and how to neutralise the effects his past binary-producing actions have imposed upon him, he reaches the state shown in the 'justice' card. He hits a plateau where no more 'bad' stuff continues to manifest in his life, and the old bad stuff is now mostly healed.

Once that state of balance (justice) is reached, it forces a new state of transition. The master of life realises that for the master the truth is 180 degrees in the opposite direction to that which the mundane individual insists is truth. Once the master realises this and starts to live his life according to that realisation, a new state of transition manifests which is depicted by the 'hanged man' card. A person who lives a life that is the opposite to common life.

This new transition causes a complete death of the old self. The steps that this death move through are depicted in the four cards in row five. Death appears, and that death leads to a balance between the lower self and the higher self, as depicted by the 'temperance' card. Once this balance starts to unfold, the intelligence who maintains binary existence (the devil), comes to the fore. His role in the life of the initiate is now seen, understood and work begins on neutralising its effect, completely. That work of neutralising the effect of the devil (nachash) is depicted in the 'lightning struct tower'. This is, of course, the next stage of transition. Row five is governed by 'mars', the god of war, and the experience represented by row 5 is often violent, rapid and frightening. It is the final blow of the sword which brings death.

The outcome of the state depicted by the 'tower' is that the veil that previously covered the student's eyes, hiding the ecstatic vision of the higher world, is now lifted. The first event that occurs at this point is depicted by the 'star' card, which is the symbol of the higher genius. 'Every man and every woman is a star' ... as Crowley once said. In other words, every common person is in truth really a part of a higher genius. Like a star, the higher genius is the source of light, floating in the immense vault of darkness that is physical space. For the unilluminated this light 'shinneth in darkness, but the darkness (the unilluminated individual) comprehendeth it not'.

This original light manifests in the binary universe as the two poles of the binary reality, which the old Adepts called ... luna and sol ... the next two cards in row six. These cards represent the two force-states that were brought in to existence by the Ain Soph, to maintain creation and are responsible for all evolution in creation.

Once these two forces are under the control of the master, who now has sacrificed his life to his higher genius, that master of lower life is resurrected, as depicted in the 'judgment' card. The card that symbolises the crude matter with death overcome. Once death is overcome, the student has not only achieved extended longevity, but can bestow that same blessing on anything in temporal existence.

That individual is now the master alchemist ... an individual who can reverse the effect of binary nature, thereby transmuting temporal states to 'gold'.

In order for an alchemical tarot with real depth to be truly Hermetic, every system of Hermetic science must be neatly overlaid on to a format such as I've described above. So, for example, if we were to look at this format from the angle of lab work, that lab instruction system must neatly 'gel' with the

initiatory system. The two must reflect each other, showing that they are both separate aspects of the same system.

ESSAY EIGHTY-THREE

Mineral Acids (Their history and production)

Alchemy and the Primary Mineral Acids

Disclaimer: the information in this essay is potentially dangerous. I strongly advise anyone considering experiment with this information to first obtain a healthy education in acid-base chemistry, and to seek expert advise, before meddling with strong acids.

Herein I discuss the basic theories concerning mineral acids, for a better understanding of this less well known and more secret aspect of mineral alchemy. It is helpful, i believe, to understand when and how these primary mineral acids were discovered, and what the old alchemists thought about them.

There is a lot of misunderstanding about mineral acids and their usefulness in alchemy. My teacher taught me, for example, that they had no canonical place in alchemy. That they formed part of a branch of neo-alchemy, or chemistry, that grew out of the pure alchemical tradition. I was also taught that the reason mineral acids were not part of pure alchemy was because the nature of these acids caused them to ruin (in some undefined way), the alchemical properties of matter. Later I discovered that these concepts are really based on a common misunderstanding, had by some students of alchemy, concerning the nature of mineral acids.

The oldest surviving historical records lead us to believe that mineral acids were used at least as far back as the 1200's, in the Middle East. Anyone who is familiar with the history of transmission of alchemical knowledge could probably accept that knowledge of mineral acids could very well reach back much further in history than the date of the surviving references

to their use. Nevertheless it is probable that mineral acids were not in use before the dawn of the Christian era. What this tells us is that, since we assume that alchemy was practiced, and the Philosophers Stone obtained, before the advent of Christianity, that the oldest methods of attaining success in the Great Work were based on processes that did not use mineral acids. Since this view of alchemical history is reasonably generally accepted it is not unlikely that it is the basis upon which the idea that mineral acids are not part of pure (or true) alchemy, sprung.

A medieval alchemist writing under the name "Gerber" (~1300 A.D.), who was probably a Spaniard, was the first to describe Sulphuric Acid and the formation of strong nitric acid as I've described the process above.

Along with this view often comes the concept that mineral acids are not 'natural'. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. Sulphuric Acid is abundant in nature. Reactions of Sulphuric Acid in the heated bowels of the earth with both Potassium Nitrate (nitre) and Sodium Chloride (sea salt) will easily produce Nitric Acid and Hydrochloric Acid, all three being the primary mineral acids used in later (post Christian, and historically post Hellenic Egyptian) alchemy.

What we have historically, where documentary evidence is concerned, is two traditions developing alongside each other and in places intermixing. First, an older tradition that was likely based on the use of Acetic Acid (probably the oldest known acid that would be of value in mineral alchemy, in the Western tradition), and the later mineral acid tradition. References to the use of mineral acids can be recognised in relatively common statements in traditional alchemical literature like "we do not burn with mundane fire, but with our water", or something to that effect. This sometimes refers to the use of mineral acids to calcine metals, or reduce them to a powder that could more easily be worked on with other (often organic) solvents. Older

non-mineral acid techniques would have used common fire, in the form of furnaces, to attain the same ends, but with a lot more effort and expense. The later innovations that were developed after the discovery of mineral acids, therefore, allowed the much more economical preparation (or manipulation) of metallic (mineral) salts.

Mineral acids are those acids that are obtained, by alchemists, from minerals by various methods. Alchemists often called these acids corrosive waters. The key mineral acid is that which the alchemists called 'Oil of Vitriol', and what we today call 'Sulphuric Acid' (H_2SO_4). Alchemists referred to it as an oil because in fact, in its pure state, it is an oil-like substance. This acid was the first of the (strong) mineral acids to be discovered.

Sulphuric Acid is the most abundant acid in nature, and because of this it was sometimes referred to by alchemists as the Universal Acid. It is also the key to obtaining the other two prime mineral acids - 'Spirit of Salt', or Hydrochloric Acid, and 'Spirit of Nitre', or Nitric Acid. Aqua Regia, another important acid used in later alchemy, and the only one which alchemists knew could decompose gold, is made by mixing Nitric and Hydrochloric Acids.

Because Sulphuric Acid is the key mineral acid I will begin with an explanation of its nature and properties.

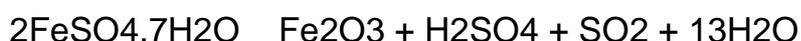
Sulphuric Acid

Sulphuric Acid was called Oil of Vitriol by alchemists because it was obtained from Green Vitriol (Iron Sulphate). Chemically it is known as the Heptahydrate (hepta = 7. Hydrate refers to the water molecules it carries), $FeSO_4 \cdot 7H_2O$. It is also referred to as copperas, or melanterite (a mineral that commonly occurs with pyrite). Iron Sulphate was called Green Vitriol because large lumps of it looked like green glass (From the Latin: vitreous - glasslike.) It is a blue-green monoclinic crystalline water-soluble salt. Green Vitriol is prepared

commercially by oxidation of pyrite (Iron Sulphide), or by treating iron with Sulphuric Acid. Green Vitriol melts at 64°C, and at 90°C it loses its water of hydration to form the monohydrate, a white, monoclinic, crystalline powder that occurs naturally as the mineral szomolnokite.

Alchemists probably discovered Sulphuric Acid around the thirteenth century. The medieval alchemist, Gerber (1300AD), provided us with the earliest surviving reference to Sulphuric Acid (and the formation of strong Nitric Acid through the use of Sulphuric Acid.) It is very likely, though, that he wasn't the first to discover Sulphuric Acid.

In the middle ages it was made by distilling Iron Sulphate (Green Vitriol) crystals:



The distillation produced Iron Oxide (Fe₂O₃), Sulphuric Acid (H₂SO₄), Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) and Water (13H₂O).

Anyone who is already familiar with the distillation of metallic acetates will recognise a similarity there with the distillation of Green Vitriol. A recognition of this similarity is important because both start (ideally) with a green substance, that various alchemists have claimed to be the green lion, which is easily disintegrated by distillation, and which decomposes into water (13H₂O), oil (H₂SO₄), salt (Fe₂O₃) and a kind of spirit (SO₂).

Diluted with water, Sulphuric Acid behaves as a typical acid. It reacts with metals to form sulphates plus hydrogen gas. It reacts with metal carbonates to form metal sulphates plus carbon dioxide plus water. It neutralises bases (alkalis) to form sulphates plus water.

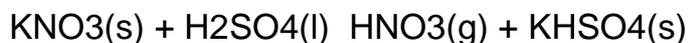
Today Sulphuric Acid is relatively easy to obtain, and in much higher purity than the old alchemists probably had access

to. In many countries litres of it can be brought at as much as 98% pure. It can also be brought from automotive suppliers who sell car battery acid, because car battery acid is concentrated Sulphuric Acid.

Great care must be taken when using Sulphuric Acid. Apart from the obvious fact that it likes to eat up and burn substances very quickly, it reacts powerfully and dangerously with many substances. For this reason sufficient research should always be undertaken before mixing Sulphuric Acid with other substances, or before heating or cooling it.

Nitric Acid

Nitric Acid was historically produced with the aid of Sulphuric Acid by what is called today a metathesis reaction:



Potassium Nitrate ($\text{KNO}_3(\text{s})$), plus Sulphuric Acid ($\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4(\text{l})$), then distilled, produces Nitric Acid (HNO_3) and Potassium Hydrogensulphate (KHSO_4 .)

In layman's terms what this describes is the mixture of Sulphuric Acid and nitre (Potassium Nitrate.) The two are then distilled and the important part of the distillate is Nitric Acid. I think how the alchemists describe this reaction was that Sulphuric Acid somehow opened the nitre, like a key, and allowed the Spirit of Nitre (Nitric Acid) to escape. In some classic texts a cryptic reference is made to such a substance that, like a key, opens and closes the secrets of nature, or the matter of the Stone, or some such comment. It is likely in at least some cases what is being described is the role and place of Sulphuric Acid, because by it Nitric and Hydrochloric Acids, then Aqua Regia, could be made by alchemists. The importance of this concept becomes clearer when we read 'The

Golden Chain of Homer', and understand how nitre and sea salt are so important in the scheme of natural process.

Under the action of light Nitric Acid slowly decomposes into oxides of nitrogen plus some free oxygen, and may thus produce a pressure in a stoppered container. If kept for any time, the stopper should be occasionally loosened (carefully!) to avoid pressure build up.

Hydrochloric Acid

The third most important acid is Hydrochloric Acid, HCl. It is an important industrial chemical and is often sold in hardware stores or pool chemical suppliers under its older name, muriatic acid. Hydrochloric Acid (the alchemist's 'spirit of salt'), can also be produced from Sulphuric Acid by a metathesis reaction:



Sodium chloride (NaCl) is added to Sulphuric Acid (H₂SO₄), heated and distilled to produce Hydrochloric Acid (HCl) and Sodium Hydrogensulphate (NaHSO₄) (or sodium bisulphate.)

The HCl has is often dissolved in water to produce aqueous Hydrochloric Acid.

Sulphuric Acid can be used to make these other acids, such as Hydrochloric and Nitric Acid, because the boiling point of Sulphuric Acid is higher than that of other acids. This allows the acid being produced to be distilled and collected separately from the starting material.

Aqua Regia

As already pointed out, Aqua Regia is (the fourth primary mineral acid of the alchemists), in modern chemical language referred to as Nitro-hydrochloric Acid, a fuming yellow or red solution. The mixture is formed by mixing concentrated Nitric

Acid and Hydrochloric Acid (for the best results), in a volume ratio of 1:3.

Adding sal ammoniac (Ammonium Chloride) to Nitric Acid will also produce Aqua Regia.

The German alchemist Andreas Libau (1540-1616 A.D.) was the first to describe the preparation of HCl as well as Aqua Regia ("royal water"). Libau is better known by the Latinized name Libavius.

Lully's Calcination Water

There is a special class of mineral based solvents that also include organic solvents as part of their composition. These solvents should never be experimented with except by an expert who has experienced guidance. This is because mixtures of some mineral acids with organic acids create highly unstable, often inflammable and sometimes explosive mixtures.

The special solvent that goes by the name of Lully's calcination water, is one of these dangerous menstruums. A brief description of this solvent can be found in "The Rosie Crucian Secrets", as follows:

18. (...) I rather choose to resolve the Sericon in Raymund's Calcination Water, which is a compound water of Vegetable Mercury, or fire natural, with the fire against nature, as Ripley testifieth; and it is more verified by Raymund in his books of Mercury, where he teacheth how to dissolve bodies with his Calcinative Water.

19. I will reveal unto you this water, which is almost unknown. Note, therefore, that the Vegetable Mercury is the Spirit of Wine (instead of which we may sometimes use distilled Vinegar) and that the Fire against Nature is a corrosive water made of Vitriol and Saltpeter.

20. Therefore take which you will, either Spirit of Wine rectified (or Aqua Vitae) or distilled Vinegar four pounds and two pounds of corrosive water and mix them together.

A little research will reveal that if we distil vitriol (iron sulphide) and saltpeter (potassium nitrate) together we will obtain dilute nitric acid. So according to the Rosicrucian Secrets nitric acid and absolute alcohol, or acetic acid, is Lully's Calcination Water.

But there is a commercial product called nital which is a combination of 5% nitric acid and 95% alcohol. Some chemists believe that even at this low percentage of Nitric Acid this compound is unstable.

It is also important to know that the primary concern with mixing any organic matter with Nitric Acid is that it can cause a fire or an explosion. Nitric Acid on its own is not explosive, but it does have very strong oxidizing properties. What this means is that if a fire does start (even as much as a spark) nitric acid will lend an abundance of pre-packaged oxygen to the ignition with such force that it will aid in the immediate and fast combustion of any organic matter within its reach. This is the basis of the power behind gunpowder, and for this same reason Nitric Acid and alcohol were once used as rocket fuel.

This same caution should be considered where the addition of Acetic Acid to Nitric Acid is concerned. Stories I could find about the problems existing between these two substances are often vague, but one example insisted that if mixtures of these chemicals were spilled on ceramic tiles they sometimes burst into flame.

It must also be kept in mind that some organic matter becomes so excited when immersed in Nitric Acid that the friction of its particles creates enough heat to initiate combustion and a fire or an explosion may follow.

I have also seen remarks which point out that certain combinations of organic materials with Nitric Acid decay over time and produce such things as esters which can be highly unstable and extremely explosive (nitro-glycerin is one example.) In some cases powdered metals will react in the same manner. So it is absolutely important that you should never mix any substance with Nitric Acid unless you have first carried out full research on what to expect. It also warrants the caution to dispose of all such solvents immediately after you have used them so that they are not subject to decay or decomposition.

All this taken into consideration we must believe that alchemists who made use of Lully's Calcination Water were constantly in danger as long as the stuff was in their laboratories.

ESSAY EIGHTY-FOUR

Weidenfeld, and the Secret(s) of the Adepts - Part1

Weidenfeld - The backstory

With this set of essays, on the subject of Weidenfeld's book 'De Secretis Adeptorum' (The Secrets of the Adepts), we might say I am finally going to discuss the subject which is the very core of alchemy, in one place. If you've been paying attention to my essays up till now you'll recognise that a lot of what I'm going to say in this set of essays has been said before. Here, though, I am simply pulling together all of that information which is scattered across the board, in to one place, and neatly arranging it so that those who didn't already get my point would have to be very mentally challenged if they now don't see it quite clearly.

Before I launch into this watershed discourse, let me define, simply, what I will be discussing.

I claim ... nay, I insist, that if we take every word that has been written on the subject of alchemy, from the ancient and classic eras, before modern fools (since the mid-1700s) started twisting everything into a circus of confusion and rubbish, there exists a core tradition and body of knowledge at the heart of alchemy, perpetuated by a chain of Adepts, concerning one key process and substance, which is the arcanum arcanorum of the true (lab) alchemical tradition.

The further we go back in history, the more simple the history of alchemy gets. We strip away all the later confusion that has been added to alchemical tradition, and we start to recognise a 'school' (if you like), of alchemical thought which revolves around one central technique, and one central

substance that that technique was designed to produce ... the Hermetic night sky revolving around its pole star.

When I say 'school' I don't mean a formal esoteric brotherhood of some kind. I mean a collection of Adepts down through the ages who studied and understood the same idea and method, either alone through books, or because they were taught the process by another Adept who knew the truth. A collection of individuals who when considered together shared in common one specialised view of alchemy.

In telling the story of Weidenfeld's book (or books, if you like), this is the idea we should begin with ... that it is a story about one teaching that describes one technique to produce one substance, which is the beginning of an entire science. And that while this teaching (or school of thought), has never been hidden, but can be plainly seen amid the works of alchemical lore, the technique has been obscured by vague speech and cipher, and the one substance it produces has almost never been mentioned in writing. *Almost*. So, that while we all know about the school of thought and practice I am alluding to, and are aware of Adepts who practiced it, and today we know a good chunk about their method, until relatively recently in history almost nobody knew the point in their teaching and practice ... that is, virtually nobody knew what the secret was that these guys (and women), were hiding amid their system.

A lot of people claimed to know, though. They invented all kinds of fancy names for the subject of the core secret of alchemy, and told us things like "...it is the unnamed crude matter to take in hand" ... and ... "t is the truth about the Secret Fire of the alchemists" and ... "it is the secret of the Philosophic Mercury" .. etc, etc. But all of this is not true. These things are, or were, secrets of a superficial kind, but they are not THE secret. The old Adepts who were experts in this school of thought and practice I am describing, hid what they knew so well, that even the nature of the secret was never known

outside of their own circle. Nobody else really understood what the secret was about. But Weidenfeld was the first person, in public, since the time of Ramon Llull, to openly describe what this core secret was about ... its nature ... without really saying too clearly what the secret really was.

To begin, then, let us look at how I have come to see the backstory, or history, to this secret.

When considering historical facts which have not left us any artifact of their existence, we can only conjecture as to what really went on. Even when artifacts exist in testament to things which were, some degree of conjecture often still must be entered in to. I just want to make that quite clear, first. What I am about to describe about my view of the history of this aspect of alchemy is just that ... my view. It is a view which I have put together from bits and pieces of information and experience which I have come across in my journey.

Let me point out that the 'school' of thought and technique we are considering here is that which I refer to as the Lullian tradition. Specifically that part of the Lullian tradition which concerns itself centrally with the pyrolytic distillation (ionisation) of organic matter, and the application of that knowledge and practice in Western lab alchemy.

Ok, so I believe that the oldest artifact of the Lullian tradition comes to us from Mesopotamia. We know as a matter of archaeological fact that in Mesopotamia at least as early as 2500BCE, that large ceramic distillation vessels existed. Apart from other commonly available bits of equipment, all that is required, of a technical nature, in the way of equipment, in order to complete the acetate path, are minerals, acetic acid and a retort (alembic). Wherever we find these items, we can safely say that it is possible that the acetate path to the Stone *could* have been known and practiced. In order for anyone to discover the acetate path process, all they had to do is digest minerals

and/or metals in vinegar to produce an acetate, then decide to try and distil that acetate until nothing but salts were left in the alembic. In my humble opinion it is not at all a huge jump in technology or intellectual prowess to suggest that even as much as 4000BCE someone could have been mucking about with distilling various different substances, and eventually produced and distilled-to-dry a mineral or metallic acetate. Then took the distillate and started experimenting with that. Once that 'mucking about' had produced products (such as acetone), that were useful in various ways, and skilled distillers became interested enough in experimenting to extremes with the products of pyrolytic distillation, it probably wouldn't have taken more than a few generations of 'dabblers' to gather together a serious body of knowledge and skill that would, after another few generations, lead to discovering the Stone.

Once a reliable and relatively sound body of knowledge was developed around the practice of pyrolytic distillation, it wouldn't have taken long for that knowledge to spread from its geographic and cultural origin to cover a vast area of the Middle East.

I think it is safe to suggest that even if that knowledge wasn't first discovered in Mesopotamia (or Egypt, for example), that it didn't come in to Europe until at least 1150AD, and when it did finally come it came from the Middle East.

Of course it is highly likely that the Greeks had at least some alchemical knowledge from the Egyptians possibly since the time of Alexander the Great. This could mean that the Greeks brought alchemy in to Europe as much as 300 years before the start of the Christian era. But if that is the case we know that historically such an early event had very little impact in Europe, and died out with the fall of the ancient Greek and Roman Empires. In this way, if alchemy had been in Europe, through Greek or Roman influence, before Christianity, by the time it

came back to Europe around the era of the first crusades, it had died out at that point.

In this way I feel it is practical to calculate the influence of alchemy in Europe, and the development of a Western Hermetic tradition, from the time of the crusades. I say crusades, because I believe that the crusades likely played the biggest role in allowing more-or-less free traffic of information between the Muslim world to The Holy Roman Empire (Catholic Christian Europe), specifically between Muslim (or older) esoteric organisations, and Western esoteric interests.

At this point in history we find that when alchemy first arrived in Europe, primarily in Portugal, Spain and France (the countries closest to Africa and the Middle East), almost the only type of alchemy (in relation to the Great Work), that we see described in any volume and detail, is acetate alchemy (Opus Saturni). It seems that other processes dealing with the Great Work were known then, either that or what we now believe to have been other paths, were simply just variations on the acetate, or the acetate itself encrypted in ways we now don't understand. But these (seemingly) other approaches were by far in the minority, as far as records go. We also know today that the most well known and practiced paths alternate to the acetate path were later inventions in history, because some of the substances used in them had not been discovered until at least 430-ish AD. In this way if there were other paths at the time of the birth of the Christian era, today we know virtually nothing about them.

We might assume, on these grounds, that at the time Ramon Llull entered the scene, the acetate path and the entire body of knowledge surrounding it, was the foremost 'school' of alchemy bought from Africa and the Middle East, in to Europe across the strait of Gibraltar. It is not peculiar to discover, then, that a gentleman using the alias Ramon Llull, living in Spain in the 1200s, recorded in his alchemic writings a well developed

system of alchemy almost entirely revolving around the key process of the pyrolytic distillation of organic matter. For this is what Llull's system is. It is a description of a whole collection of ideas and practices which all rely on his understanding of the secret properties of substances derived by the pyrolytic distillation of metallic acetates (primarily).

Llull can't have been the only person in Europe at his time to know about all of this. Even in his day it is likely that there were a number of acetate path alchemists spread over Europe from Spain to Germany. Maybe even in to Eastern Europe and Russia.

So it is not strange to discover, 300 years later, in the latter decades of the 1500's, Johann Isaac Hollandus writing documents on both a metallic and a plant process centered around pyrolytic distillation. There is no doubt in my mind that Hollandus had a knowledge of pyrolytic distillation that had him seeing one process that could be applied to plants, animal matter and minerals. He had a universal vision of the alchemical process. It is highly improbable that Hollandus was the only man in Europe to possess this degree of understanding of alchemy. But however many Adepts had the same view of the same system as Hollandus, there can't have been many, because Hollandus is the only guy who wrote about the plant aspect of this work, who's writings have survived, that we know of. That is a peculiar situation, and one that suggests that a full grasp of the range of the pyrolytic tradition was known by a limited number of Europeans. For some reason the metallic acetate process was widely known and written about, but the full story of this system must have been kept a closely guarded secret.

By the time the renaissance rolled around, acetate alchemy was the most widely discussed, written about and practiced aspect of the great work in Europe. We should not be surprised, then, that by the time the historically most famous Western

Hermetic fraternity turned up on the scene in the mid-1600s, the Brotherhood of the Rosie Cross, their core alchemical concepts were centred on the acetate path. The broadest record of acetate path texts we have available to us today, written after 1620 and before 1800, seem to largely be direct products either of the early R+C teaching, or are 'leaks' from that fraternity out into the wider esoteric community.

It is relatively self evident, also, that in the earliest centuries of the spread of alchemical knowledge across Europe, that this spread was heavily reliant on members of the Catholic ecclesiastic community who were seriously involved in esoteric study. In the UK in particular we have a good number of examples of texts written by ordained members of the Catholic Church. Ripley just being one of the more prominent examples. From this collection of church alchemists we see a long tradition of almost exclusively Great Work acetate path alchemy.

At the end of our trail we find two important texts which define the importance and place of the acetate tradition. The first of these books is Weidenfeld's 'De Secretis Adeptorum' (1684) and the second is Becker's 'Das Acetone' (1862).

ESSAY EIGHTY-FIVE

Weidenfeld, and the Secret(s) of the Adepts - Part2

"To The Students of the More Secret Chymy"

Before I begin, just a quick note. My intention in this next set of essays is not to work from one end of this book to the other explaining every point. My intent is to discuss only the opening sections of the book, where the core concept of Weidenfeld's discourse is laid out. So I am going to end this set of essays once we have reached the point in the book where this core concept, the nature of the Philosophic Spirit of Wine, is explained in detail.

This edition of the book was published in England, in English, in 1684 by Tho.Hawkins (and Sunderland) publishers by appointment to the King.

The book opens with a note from the publisher titled C.R. (Which I am guessing stands for Charles Regina - Charles the King). This opening note simply makes the point that Weidenfeld wanted to publish his book in Britain, in English, and requested of the King's publishers that right. Upon agreement the King's publishers then claimed a type of copyright, to be the only persons legally allowed to publish, print and sell this text in Britain.

Next we have the title page, then two pages of Latin text, which describes the labours of the Adept alchemist in relation to Greek myth, if I'm right. This comes in the way of a foreword, it seems, by a gentleman by the name of Albertus Otho Faber, a British medical Doctor.

Weidenfeld then continues with a dedication of his book, in English, to the famous Robert Boyle (of the Royal Society).

Weidenfeld begins, in his dedication, by explaining how he came to gain understanding of the subject material of which this book (or four books), is composed. His study began with Paracelsus, where he set out to understand the nature of and method of making the 'arcanums' (higher medicines), of Paracelsus.

For some years he struggled to understand these recipes, and gained a lot of insight in to the methods Paracelsus used to encypher his instructions on practical alchemy. Weidenfeld admits, though, that in trying to understand Paracelsus he was confused partly because he himself was seeking the secret to making the 'alkahest', and that his beliefs about what this alkahest was were inaccurate, and so distorted the way he looked at what Paracelsus was trying to say.

Eventually, though, Weidenfeld understood enough of Paracelsus' system to be able to figure out why and how Paracelsus devised his system of ranking and naming medicines into such categories as ... magisteries, astrums, arcanums, essences, etc.

But Weidenfeld still failed to properly produce any of these preparations, which he calls both medicines and menstruums. Nevertheless, in his failure he recognised that Paracelsus was hiding a secret in his writings, about something that was necessary in order to make all of these medicines. He eventually realised, also, that other Adepts such as Lully and Basilius were also hiding this secret of preparation. In time Weidenfeld recognised that this one missing secret was the thing Lully had called the Philosophical Spirit of Wine.

[Quote]

"Light adding Light to Light, appeared so clear, that their preparation, variety, simple and literal sense showed themselves all at once, one only Word remaining unknown, yet expressing the universal Basis of all the Adepts, and that is

Spirit of Wine, not Common, but Philosophical; which being known and obtained, the greatest Philosophical, Medicinal, Alchymical, and Magical Mysteries of the more secret Chymy, will be in the power of the Possessor." [Page 18 of the pdf version]

So this is the first important claim of Weidenfeld ... that at the heart of true 'more secret chymy', was knowledge of a secret substance that made real alchemy possible. That without this secret nobody could make true, powerful, alchemical remedies. And that upon reading and comparing many of the writings of the old Adepts, Weidenfeld recognised that a select group of them all had this secret in common, and were all hiding it.

[Quote]

"In no Books of the Adepts, hitherto known of me, have I found any thing rare, that owes not its original Being to this Spirit" [Page 19 of the pdf version]

So Weidenfeld insists that all of the rare and mysterious preparations of the old Adepts relied entirely on the Philosophic Spirit of Wine for their preparation. This substance, and knowledge of it, he referred to as ... "the key to all philosophy" ... a very important statement.

Having discovered this concept, Weidenfeld now turned all his effort toward discovering this Philosophic Spirit of Wine (PSW), how it could be made and used.

In the next section of his text we now see Weidenfeld speak directly to ... The Students of the more secret chymy. [Page 21 of the pdf version].

[Quote]

"It is to be wondered at, but rather lamented, to see such imperfect Philosophical Systems, as have been hitherto bequeathed to us by the Masters of this Art, not seldom

contradicting both Nature and themselves, whereas the Miracles of Nature might by virtue of this Art have been truly and plainly without any convulsion or contraction of words expressed, in which respect I dare, with Philosophical Licence here affirm, that most of the Adepts have by their Writings declared themselves to the World better Chymists than Philosophers." [Page 23]

I find passages like this interesting, because they show us that in all ages the nature of those who have come to the study of alchemy has not changed. Among such students we always find those who are seen as 'masters of the art', but who in fact do not follow the path of Nature, and have more of an exoteric (chemical) approach to alchemy, than an esoteric one. Weidenfeld is therefore reminding us here that alchemy is about 'philosophy', not about chemistry.

And again ...

[Quote]

"Lately indeed we had not only hope, but promises also from the Rosy-Crucian Fraternity, as if they had a mind to make this our Age more happy by their Studies; but no effect being hitherto heard of, we cannot but fear, their fair promises will never be performed.'

'On the contrary, Experience teacheth, that instead of an universal good derived from the Fountain of this Art, the World hath rather been involved by it in great and many Miseries: for the Adepts affirming, yea more than often with oaths confirming, that they in their Writings treated more clearly and truly of the Art, than any other Philosophers, have thereby instigated many young Novices of all Degrees and Faculties, to begin their Chymical Labours according to the Method of their Prescriptions, exposing themselves not only to intolerable Expences, but also being as it were obstinate in a certain confidence of their understanding the Authors genuine meaning, do rather die amongst the Coals and Fornaces, than

recede from their Imaginations, once imprinted in them for true..."

We are reminded here that the aim of alchemy is not to illuminate greater humanity, in order to make life in general and science in particular more agreeable and productive. On the contrary, alchemy is an initiatory science, meant for the study and practice of those who are ready to receive illumination.

And again ...

[Quote]

"Now these Receipts I was willing to communicate to you, ye indefatigable Students of this Art, for the Reasons already given, as also that you may thoroughly apprehend the absolute necessity of Lully's Spirit of Wine in our Chymy..." [Page 29]

Weidenfeld repeats that he insists the the start of all true alchemy is Lully's PSW ... which then, if he is correct, bodes us ask ... what then of individuals and systems of alchemy that encourage us to believe in processes that in no way speak of Lully's Spirit, or do not include it as a necessary part of their process?

This first section of Weidenfeld's writing, the section for Students of the more Secret Chymy, focuses primarily on making the point that Lully's PSW is the heart of true alchemy, and that we won't discover and practice anything of worth until we understand the PSW and have it in our hands. Secondly, Weidenfeld goes to some length to describe the way in which various well known alchemical authors have become confused by each others writings, and exhorts us to be aware of the reality of liars, tricksters and fakers in the realm of alchemical instruction.

ESSAY EIGHTY-SIX

Weidenfeld, and the Secret(s) of the Adepts - Part3

"The Preface"

Now, let's jump into the 'Preface' section of Weidenfeld's book.

Weidenfeld begins his discourse in the preface by explaining that the Adepts who follow in the line of Lully discuss the nature of the Great Work using the analogy of the mechanics of human procreation. Weidenfeld also makes the point, at the bottom of page 52 (pdf version), that these Adepts adopted this specific analogy from Lully, and then, that Hermes himself used the basics of this analogy in the Emerald Tablet. So we might assume this 'procreation' analogy has a very long history.

Weidenfeld then starts to get specific about this procreative analogy, and the concept of 'seed' where he says [page 53] ...

"... And in this point our Understanding knows that D. (his living Heaven, or Dissolvent) hath a Vegetable property, the similitude of which, R and S (Gold and Silver) do transmit into the Sulphur of Nature, which is the Spirit of Metals, or Stone, or transforming Poyson, according to the signification of Raymund ..."

Here we learn the first key property of the Philosophic Spirit of Wine (PSW), which Lully (and other philosophers), have called their 'heaven'.

We are told that this substance 'hath a vegetable property'. In other words, that it either has its source in the plant kingdom, or that it has picked up some property from the plant kingdom.

This is why Lully used the analogy of 'wine making' when discussing this substance. Because the key part of this substance, the thing it aids the alchemical process with, is its vegetable property.

The next thing Weidenfeld points out is that gold and silver, transmit this vegetable property to the Sulphur of Nature.

This last paragraph might seem a bit cryptic, but it really is simple. To understand it we need to turn to Ripley, who explains in detail how an oil made from either gold or silver is the ferment of the Philosopher's Stone. Gold for the red stone, and silver for the white stone. Ripley also carefully tells us how these ferments (oils) are made ... by radically dissolving gold or silver in a solvent made from the distillate products of the acetate pyrolysis. We know today, as it seems Lully may also have known, that most of the distillate products of the pyrolytic decomposition of lead acetate are in fact 'organic' products, not metallic. Therefore, they derive from the plant kingdom.

Ripley's process also tells us that at the end of the Great Work, the Stone is conected basically by adding either the red or white ferment to the original calcined salt of lead (Pb), which Ripley clearly calls the Sulphur of Nature. In other words ...

Vegetable property goes in to > lead acetate > special solvent > oil of gold or silver > sulphur of nature.

There is a clear chain of migration there, that comes around in a full circle, at least in theory.

Then Weidenfeld spells it out clearly [page 53]...

"The Intention of the Philosopher (Lully) is to demonstrate, that the Philosophers Sulphur, or Stone, or transforming Poyson receives all its benefit by the excitation of the vegetative Virtue, which is in this Divine Vegetative Heaven."

And then ...

"The fame Author in the Continuation of his Doctrine, saith. And also the Understanding knows, that the said Metals R, and S, (Gold and Silver) retain the property of Menstruum, with which they extend their similitudes into exotick substances, transmuting the said substances into their own kind, which is the reason why we call it Vegetable Mercury ; as also because it is extracted out of Vegetables,"

Weidenfeld makes it very clear here, that when oil of gold or silver are made with this special solvent, something of the vegetable property in that solvent stays with the oil. Then those oils pass that property on to exotic (foreign) substances, transmuting them. Then he finishes that paragraph saying ... 'because it [the vegetable heaven] is extracted out of vegetables.'

And he quotes Ripley ...

"... So if you have the Water of Sol and Luna, it will attract other Bodies to its kind, and make their Humors perfect by its intrinsick Virtue and Heat..."

The water of Sol and Luna being the oils of gold and silver ... further ...

"We, saith Espanietus, to deal plainly and truly; affirm, that the whole work may be perfected by two Bodies only, that is, Sol and Luna rightly prepared..."

Espanietus is mixing it up here, and now uses the terms Sol and Luna differently. By Sol he means either the oil of gold or the oil of silver (sol = sulphur), and by Luna he means the Sulphur of Nature (salt of lead), probably dissolved with the

special solvent, and so volatised, which he explains in the following passage ...

"Sol is the Male, for he yields the active and informing seed : Luna is the Female ; which is called the Matrix and Vessel of Nature, because she receives the seed of the Male into her womb, and nourisheth it with her Menstruum, [...] But the Philosophers do not by the name of Luna mean common Luna which also acts the parts of a Male in their (white) work ... "

Remembering what Weidenfeld has already told us, that the old Adepts used technical language differently, and so confused each other.

Next Sendivogious tells us (as quotes Weidenfeld) ...

"The fruit of this Tree can be putrified in nothing, but in this water only ; for no other water can penetrate the pores of this Apple, but this : and you must know that the solar Tree sprang also out of this Water, which is extracted from a magnetical virtue out of the Rays of Sol and Luna and therefore they have great affinity one with the other..."

By Apple Sendivogious means gold. We can understand Sendivogious' analogy here if we recognise that Ripley calls the transparent distillate from lead acetate 'our magnetical water', and that the rays of Sol and Luna are the red and white fumes of the pyrolytic distillation. These fumes are emanations from the Sun and Moon, or the two things from which all things have their source.

"... Saith Parisinus, that the wise men say. To know the Celestial Water, which reduceth our Body into a Spirit, is the chief Mystery of this Art."

Here, then, is the test that we have found the right 'water', because it is the only thing which 'our body' can be reduced 'to a spirit' by (an oil).

Then [page 57] ...

"... On the contrary, the unctous Spirit of Philosophical Wine does by its unctuousity mollifie a dry Body, and transmute it not into a Salt or Vitriol, but into an Oyl ..."

This is Weidenfeld's way of pointing out that the PSW is not at all like mineral acids, which only reduce 'bodies' (metals) to a salt, which alchemists commonly referred to as vitriols or calx.

At this stage we can briefly stop and do a little summation of what is going on in Weidenfeld's book to this point. Basically our author is setting the scene. He is telling us that at the very heart of alchemy there is a secret substance, a solvent, commonly called (Philosophic) Spirit of Wine, Heaven and Vegetable Heaven by the old Adepts. He gives us this information in a way that he is saying ... hey, look here, this is something about the existence of which virtually nobody knows.

This alone is a serious thing. Because, for example, if you look at this claim just by itself, up until about 10 years ago you never saw anyone in mainstream alchemy discussing this idea. Virtually nobody knew that there was a philosophy, started most immediately with Lully, that all of real alchemy revolved around knowing one specific solvent. There is no argument from me that prior to 10 years ago students of alchemy had Weidenfeld's book, but who understood what they read there? Obviously nobody, because nowhere do we see anyone saying ... hey, look at this!

Then suddenly about 10 years ago, about the same time one of my ex-students stole my digital transcription of Weidenfeld and uploaded it to the net, we see a bunch of people running around stimulating discussion on the subject and trying to discover this vegetable heaven. And they did this like it was a very matter-of-fact thing. People were willing to accept that this substance existed, and therefore that the basic philosophy Weidenfeld expounded about it might therefore be true ... but nobody stopped and asked ... what if this substance really does exist, and what if what Weidenfeld says about it is true? What if there really is no real alchemy without it?

There are huge implications to the fundamental thesis Weidenfeld expounds in his book up to the end of the preface. But who ever stopped to actually think about what is being said there?

We must ask ourselves .. is this basic theory actually likely? If so, then is it likely to be true that Weidenfeld's four books, and all their recipes, all founded on the PSW, are true? Then, lastly if the PSW exists and all these medicines and solvents are real, was all of this only a product of Weidenfeld's theoretical speculation, or, as he himself claimed, did he really make all of these preparations? Because if he did make all of these preparations, or even just one of them, he needed the PSW in order to do so.

In the next essay we're going to look at exactly what Weidenfeld had to say about what this PSW really is.

ESSAY EIGHTY-SEVEN

Weidenfeld, and the Secret(s) of the Adepts - Part4

"Of Vegetaile Menstruums of The First Kind."

(The Heaven, Essence, or Spirit of Wine of Lully Described)

Now, let's get into the marrow of the subject. Weidenfeld's presentation of his conclusions about what the Philosophic Wine is, and what the Spirit of that Wine is.

On page 59 of the pdf version by quoting from the text 'De Quinta Essentia'. The quote begins ...

"Take Wine, red or white ..." but we know that we are supposed to not take this literally. The concept 'wine' is a cipher, based on using an analogy. The actual substance being discussed is either from the vegetable kingdom, or it has properties derived from the vegetable kingdom (as we discussed earlier). It also is a substance, like wine, that comes in both a red and white colour.

Next we are told to ... 'distill an aqua ardens' ... from this red or white wine. Ardent water is a term distinct to acetate alchemy technical language. It does not refer to ethanol. This much is fairly commonly understood.

We are also told to distil this ardent water 'through brass pipes' (as the custom is). The key to understanding this little passage is the word 'custom'. It refers to something which is commonly a practice, but which may not in fact be necessary. Other authors describing this part of the process make no mention of this concept at all. It is possible they were all hiding something relative to the use of 'brass', but in my experience this is not the case. Nobody who today has argued the necessity of distilling through brass or copper has ever provided

any serious argument as to why this is 'alchemically' necessary. Such arguments are based on chemistry, the kind of which has no relation to the substances or work we are looking at here.

Next we are told to rectify the distillate (ardent water), three times, and that the tradition seven times are unnecessary. The measure of enough rectifying distillations, our author tells us, is to macerate sugar in the distillate, and then when we set the aqua ardens alight, it will burn away to nothing. Again, ethanol won't do that.

Next we are told that this rectified aqua ardens is ... 'the matter out of which the quintessence is made'. In other words, we are not actually after the ardent water itself, we are after a substance, called a quintessence, that can be made out of this ardent water. This quintessence is 'the' thing we are really looking for, and looking at, when considering Lully's big secret.

Now we take the ardent water rectified three times, and put it in a pelican (circulatory). Our author then advises us to warm the pelican by immersing it in horse dung or the 'mark' of wine (the solids left over after grapes have been pressed). In other words, warm the flask in active compost.

We are then told, as long as the decomposing compost maintains a steady heat, that as the ardent water circulates inside the vessel, it will 'split', and a substance will be separated out which is the colour of 'heaven' (the sky - sic: sky blue). This sky blue substance rises to the top and floats on the surface of the now split ardent water. At the same time the lower half of the liquid will be 'a muddy colour', and is considered 'the feces'.

Our author then tells us that if we open the pelican at this point we will recognise a beautiful aroma, which has the property of attracting birds to it, if the aroma is allowed to drift outdoors.

Our author then tells us that this sky blue substance is technically known as 'vegetable mercury'. If we understand the idea presented to this point, then this throws light on the inaccuracy of Albertus' use of the concept 'vegetable mercury'.

Next we are told that this vegetable mercury can now be applied in the Magistry of the transmutation of metals. So we aren't mucking about here. He is getting right to the point.

This first description of how to make the vegetable mercury (quintessence) is nice and simple, and provides us with just a good basic idea of what it is that we are considering here. All of the fundamental concepts involved in this process are provided in this opening passage, in their most simple form.

Next Weidenfeld gives us his commentary (Annotations) on this opening passage.

He starts by telling us that he is going to describe the making of 24 kinds of menstruums (solvent-medicines), and that from his descriptions of these solvent-medicines we will see that each of them requires this sky-blue vegetable mercury in order to make them. Weidenfeld also jumps in here and equates the term 'spirit of philosophical wine' with vegetable mercury (sic: the sky-blue quintessence). It is important to keep this equation in mind, because later we're going to see that this terminology relationship gets complicated.

Now [page 61] Weidenfeld talks about this vegetable mercury as a solvent, and explains that it can dissolve the oils out of plant matter, and that this use for it shows it least (or weakest) use. Then Weidenfeld says that this vegetable mercury 'becomes' stronger when it is used to dissolve dry substances, which are not oily (like plants are). We might assume by this that he is basically talking about salts, or minerals.

Next Weidenfeld gets technical. He tells us that when the vegetable mercury becomes homogeneous with other substances (binds with them and unites with them, wholly), this is how 'essences' are made with vegetable mercury. Things are dissolved in the vegetable mercury, it binds with them, and becomes 'augmented' by them (in other words the vegetable mercury has its power increased by them), and as a result a third type of substance is produced ... neither the original plant nor the vegetable mercury, but a third and new thing. Which he calls an 'essence'.

Lastly, in this annotation, he makes a clear point, so that we don't misunderstand what is going on here. He reminds us that we aren't talking about common ethanol. To make his point he then quotes Zacharias, where he describes how he tried to perform this work by using common wine, and failed. Weidenfeld then quotes Ripley, making the same point [page 62].

Then, next, on page 62 we are introduced to a new idea in relation to the nature of the Philosophic Wine, and that is, just like common wine this Philosophic Wine has a substance which is like tartar ...

"... for so saith Raymund: That Tartar is blacker than the Tartar from the black Grapes of Catalonia; whereupon it is called Nigrum nigrius Nigro; that is, Black Backer than Black:"

This is important because each new piece of information we get about substances related to the Philosophic Wine helps is come closer to identifying what that Wine is ... because we can start building up a data base of characteristics.

Then, on page 63, point number 3, we see a curious comment ...

"It is necessary to observe that the Spirit of Philosophical Wine appears in two forms, either like an Oyl swimming upon all

Liquors, or like the Spirit of Common Wine ..."

Things start to get complex at this stage. We are now told that the Spirit of Philosophical Wine ... which we were previously told was rectified by distillation three times out of Philosophic Wine, can appear as either an ethanol-like substance or like an oily substance which floats upon certain kinds of liquids (liquors). Weidenfeld then points out that these two conditions are not different substances, but are the same substance at different degrees of purity (rectification).

Now at the bottom of page 63, in point 4, we are told ... that distinction must be made between these two conditions of the Spirit of Philosophical Wine (SPW) ... and he uses the analogy of them being like Father and Son to each other.

Weidenfeld then makes the point that the first condition of the SPW requires a philosophic process to produce it ... "its preparation require Laborem Sophias ..." ... which he calls the most secret, difficult and 'dangerous' work of all true chymistry.

After which he tells us that the second condition of the SPW is made easily.

Following this Weidenfeld gives us examples, by quoting a couple of alchemists, how the kinds of terminology that is used (primarily Latin names), to describe this first condition of the SPW. Then he continues [page 64] by describing the kinds of names that are used to describe the second condition of this SPW in classic alchemical literature.

The plot thickens when Weidenfeld describes something about what the second SPW is, and how it is made, by referring to comments Paracelsus makes in his 5th Chapter of the 3rd

Book of Long Life. Our attention is drawn to the fact that Paracelsus calls the 'essences' of herbs the Elixir of Life ... then he uses Balm (sic: Lemon Balm) as an example.

"Digest Balm (with the first Spirit of Philosophical Wine) a Philosophical Month in an Athanar, then separate so, as that the duplicated Elements may appear apart, and the Quintessence , which is the Elixir of Life, will presently shew itself ..."

Is that looking familiar? One of the things I have regularly said about the Ens Melissa is that the value in that process is not so much in its end product, but in what you can learn from how it is made.

Next Weidenfeld now comments [page 65], expanding what he has previously said about the source material of the SPW. He tells us that both the first and second SPW can be also made from animal substances. It is helpful to understand, here, that both sources are organic. Light is thrown on this fact when we read [top of page 66] ...

"Though neither the first nor second Spirit can he produced out of the dry Kingdom of Minerals ..."

The starting matter must be organic.

In my next essay we will look at the examples Weidenfeld gives of quotes from respected alchemists, when they are describing the 'wine' or essences of plants.

ESSAY EIGHTY-EIGHT

Weidenfeld, and the Secret(s) of the Adepts - Part5

"Descriptions of the Essence, Soul or Spirit of Wine, by three alchemists."

We continue, now, from page 67 of the pdf version, where Weidenfeld quotes Johannes de Rupescissa.

Weidenfeld quotes Rupescissa at this point because he wants to make a clear point that the PSW is a quintessence. So he is making a technical point here using Rupescissa's words to explain the fact that this PSW is a quintessence, or contains a quintessence.

This point is then driven home, in Rupescissa's explanation, by explaining that while the PSW is called a quintessence, in fact the 'stuff' that is the quintessence is inside the PSW, and has to be 'extracted' by circulating the PSW (applying pelicanisation). Rupescissa then describes briefly how to make a pelican (a circulatory vessel).

At the bottom of page 67 Rupescissa then gives us a very important key piece of information about the PSW, which helps us to understand just what it really is ...

" ... the best Aqua ardens that can be made, hath yet a material mixture of the four Elements; therefore it is by God ordained, that the Quintessence which we seek for, should be by continual Assensions and Dessensions; separated from the corruptible composition of the four Elements ..."

From this short passage we learn three important things. (1) That it is possible to make crap aqua ardens, that won't do what we need it to do. (2) That properly made aqua ardens is

composed of the Four Elements. That means it has four substances in it. (3) That according to accurate Hermetic philosophy, if you want a quintessence, it needs to be extracted out of the Four Elements (sic: it is of course the Fifth Element), and that this is done according to art by pelicanisation.

Next Rupescissa repeats what we've heard before. The aroma of this quintessence will be super-admirable, and as before he repeats that this highly beautiful aroma is one of the first signs that we have indeed attained the right quintessence.

The next qualifying mark of this quintessence Rupescissa describes at the bottom of page 68, and on into the top of page 69. He tells us that the original aqua ardens is hot to taste, and very watery. But that after circulation, the quintessence has not that same heat, nor that same wateriness.

Rupescissa also makes the point that this quintessence is in itself incorruptible (it won't decompose), especially in relation to the four corruptible Elements from which it was extracted. With that explanation Rupescissa closes his discussion.

Weidenfeld now moves on to quote Paracelsus, in order to show us that Paracelsus also knew this quintessence of the PSW, but more importantly that Paracelsus has a different way of making it. This 'differing methods' is about to become one of Weidenfeld's main themes of this part of his thesis.

The quote from Paracelsus is taken from his "Third Book on Long Life", and begins on Weidenfeld's page 69.

Paracelsus does not begin his process for making the quintessence by taking aqua ardens. But instead he takes the original 'wine' (philosophic wine), itself, and pours it into a pelican. Then he digests the wine for two months, and during that time the wine 'splits', and becomes thin below (phlegm), with an oil (fatness) floating on the top. As soon as this oil is

seen floating he then takes it, by itself, and puts it into a smaller flask (phial), and warms that sealed flask at digestive heat, and the result is what he describes as a preparation (medicine) for long life.

So now we know our quintessence smells wonderful, is oily (fatty), it is sky-blue (or green) in colour, and if prepared right is a life-elixir.

Next Weidenfeld quotes Guido (from this Thesaurus Chymicum), who, again, has a different method again for making this quintessence.

Guido tells us we can take 'either' red or white wine. So we know that whatever this philosophic wine is, it comes in a red colour and a white (probably transparent) colour.

Guido distils the wine in a water bath. So we know by this that the volatile portion of whatever this wine really is, distils at less than 100°C. Once the volatile part is distilled away we are left with a residue in the bottom of the flask that has the consistency of honey.

Now we take the two parts of the distilled wine, the distillate and the residue, put them both together into a curcubit (boiling flask, taken from the Latin name for a pumpkin or gourd), and digest these two substances together for six weeks ... after which a green oil will float on the surface, which you should then collect separately.

Three different methods for basically doing the same thing.

In my next essay we'll look at Weidenfeld's 'observations' about these three techniques.

ESSAY EIGHTY-NINE

Weidenfeld, and the Secret(s) of the Adepts - Part 6

'Weidenfeld's notes and observations on the Quintessence'
(As made by Reprecussia, Paracelsus and Guido)

So we now are on page 70 of the pdf version.

"From the Receipts, we think these Things following
worthy of Observation."

Now Weidenfeld sums up the conclusions he makes from
the previous quotes and ideas.

First, he reminds us the red and white wines spoken of are
not common wine, but are cypher-terms, terms to be
understood as being used as analogies. That means that the
real substances are similar to real wine in some way. Then he
explains that the names given to the 'spirit' of philosophical wine
are not cypher-terms, but are accurate descriptors. Aqua
Ardens (firey water), Aqua Vitae (the water of life), Spirit or
Essence of Philosophic Wine.

Next, that this ardent water has properties that are similar to
ethanol. For example, when you distil it to rectify it, it comes
over the still-head before the dregs do. So to rectify it, you use
the same method as used to rectify ethanol. Also that just like
ethanol, once rectified, if you soak sugar or linen (flax textile) in
the ardent water, and set fire to it, the spirit will burn, and burn
up the sugar or linen too.

Next, if you circulate this ardent water it will it will become
less wet (watery), and will lose its sharpness. If the circulation is
continued, the spirit will split, and become part a dirty watery-
like substance and part an oily-like substance floating on the

watery portion. This floating oily portion is then known as the essence of philosophic wine.

Now Weidenfeld says two very interesting things [page 70, the end of point 3] ... First, that the philosophic essence, after long circulation, can be increasingly made thicker and drier, turned in to a salt and sublimated. Secondly, that Hollandus describes having done this IN THE PROCESS OF MAKING HIS VEGETABLE STONE.

" ... by continual Circulation brought that Oyl to Driness; so as to be sublimeable as a volatile Salt, and that not but by a slrong Fire, as Isaacus affirms himself to have experienced in the Description of his Vegetable Stone..."

That statement right there is probably the most significant piece of evidence so far, as to just what it is that we are considering, in the way of what these red and white wines are, what their essence is, and how to obtain them. Anyone sufficiently familiar with Hollandus' Opera Vegetabile will know that one of the enigmas of that process is the elusive 'sal armoniac' (harmonic salt), which Hollandus describes. Here in Weidenfeld is the explanation ... and in Hollandus, we now see the basic methodology of producing the 'wines' and their secret essence.

In other words, we are talking here of a process which is founded in pyrolytic distillation.

Next, that the essence of ardent water can be made in various different ways, and each author-chemist seems to have had his own favourite method.

Then, that the amount of time it takes to make this essence, its aroma, colour, etc, vary depending on the method used to make it. This is very important when hunting for references in

other author's works which describe this process. He then says Lully's essence was sky blue. Guido's was (new-grass) green.

Further, that its aroma is always highly fragrant, unless it has something else dissolved in it. Especially minerals or metals.

Also, that this 'heaven' (the coelum of the philosophers), is the first of all the alchemist's menstruums, is both a solvent and a medicine. As a medicine it is the essence of long life (Aqua Vitae).

Then, Weidenfeld quotes Lully, explaining why this substance was called 'heaven' by Lully. First, because in it, like all true Q-states, it contains and can act in contrary ways. That is, it contains the essence of binary law. Secondly, that it receives the forms of all things (the patterns of all things). That is, it has the property of the anima mundi. The spirit or memory of the world. Thirdly, that it is called heaven because it is the cause of all motion, and brings all things the power to act and the power of action. Fourthly, that like heaven it is incorruptible. Fifthly, because it is the colour and purity of heaven.

ESSAY NINETY

The Emerald Tablet of Hermes - Part 1

I have finished my Weidenfeld essays now, since it was only my intention to discuss the lead-in to Weidenfeld's main treatise (the recipes for how to use the Spirit of Philosophic Wine). The entire initial focus of Weidenfeld's discourse is in those opening sections of his book, where he defines just what Lully's wine is, and what its spirit is. Once you understand those two things, everything else is simple. The recipes he provides are then an open book.

So now I want to move on to a discussion of the Emerald Tablet, because so many alleged students of Hermetism know about this tablet, but in thinking about Hermetism, and in practicing its principles, they virtually completely ignore what the tablet is there to teach.

So I start this set of essays with the hope of making an understanding of the tablet clearer, and of providing a clear explanation of just why the tablet is so important to Hermetism.

To begin I'm going to quote a slightly edited version of the chapter on the history of the tablet from my first book, simply so I don't have to re-write that information ... and so we can start this set of essays with a good historic background.

The Emerald Tablet and Its History

The word Emerald has been used at various times in history to refer to any number of different green minerals, stones or gems. It has been suggested that the original Emerald tablet of Hermes could have been made from any of these, or simply

that Emerald meant it was painted or stained a green colour. Such suggestions would never have been taken seriously by anyone who had a depth of understanding of the alchemical laboratory tradition.

In his epic work *Parzival*, the famous 13th century Bavarian poet Wolfram von Eschenbach demonstrated just such an intimate knowledge of the alchemical tradition. He described the Holy Grail as having been made from an Emerald gemstone. Von Eschenbach must have been aware that the description of the Grail's powers, and the powers attributed to the Philosopher's Stone, were identical, and that there was some kind of analogous relationship between the two items that he wanted to draw attention to. Curiously, he might even have known that in some approaches to the Great Work the matter from which the Philosopher's Stone is made appears at different stages as both an emerald coloured oil (the green lion), an emerald coloured gum (the gum of sericon) and an emerald green vitrified mass (depending on how one approaches the work).

Of equal interest to this subject is the less well-known alchemical art of dissolving precious gems so that they might be cast in a mold to any shape one desired. The post Egyptian (Arabic) era theme of the tablet text is overtly alchemical in nature. This theme is supported by the idea that its maker might have been skilled enough in the practical art of alchemy to be able to liquefy enough precious Emeralds to allow him to cast from them the famous tablet. As any craftsman knowledgeable in the basics of casting knows, the possibility that this was the means by which the tablet was manufactured is suggested in the historic claim that the Syriac or Phoenician characters the tablet's message was originally presented in were said to be in bas-relief (standing out of the base, not carved in to it).

So, when examining the concept of the Emerald tablet the first thing we are struck by is the possibility that the object itself

was created by a very skilled alchemist. This possibility is compelling in its influence on setting the scene for consideration of the nature of the tablet as a source of information, itself.

If the original tablet of legend did really exist we have no firm idea at all of its origin. At least one of the early translations of the tablet text closes with the statement that claims the creator and author of the tablet to be 'Hermes Trismegistus'. But since we really do not know who that character was, or in what exact age he lived, claims about the antiquity of the object can only be vague guesses. The concept of the tablet first enters history when it was claimed by Arab authors, roughly as early as 650 AD, to have been discovered in the East, possibly Egypt, at some point during the three centuries leading up to, or the first century of, the Christian era.

There are a number of very old stories in existence about the possible details of that discovery. Probably the two most popular versions involve an individual called Apollonius of Tyana (in Arabic - Balínús), who it is said lived somewhere around the years 3-97 AD (roughly). The second story revolves around Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE). According to the legend of Balínús, he found the tablet in a cave clutched in the hands of the corpse of Hermes Trismegistus himself, along with a book called 'The Book of Causes'.

The second-most popular legend insists that Alexander the Great had access to the tablet, roughly 250 years before Balínús. One version of that story claims that Alexander, some time after having conquered Egypt, was informed of the whereabouts of Hermes' tomb, where the tablet was secreted. It is said that Alexander removed the artifact and took it to Heliopolis, where it was placed more-or-less on public display.

Exactly who might have actually discovered the tablet and who its creator might have been are not as important as the possibility that such an artifact existed. If it did, we might also

assume that the original was available to study some time after the period of Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt.

Eventually the city of Alexandria in Egypt became renowned as the hub of esoteric activity in that part of the world. This was partly due to the collection of ancient MSS that the famous library of Alexandria gave access to, which was said to have been the largest collection of ancient wisdom in the world. Occultists, alchemists, philosophers, qabalists and Hermetists from all over the Middle and Near East, from Africa, Greece and Rome congregated in Alexandria in order to be part of the greatest esoteric and scientific cultural exchanges of the age. In this way, at some point during a period of around 600 years, roughly 360 BCE to 400 AD, every branch of hidden knowledge that would eventually come together to form the basis of the Western mystery tradition was represented in Alexandria. Esoteric and philosophic ideas that had formerly developed in relative isolation from each other now freely interacted, exchanged and debated their views. One of the main subjects of interest that many of these different esoteric and philosophic schools in the city had in common was a study of the Emerald tablet. We know this because esoteric tradition, and conventional history to an extent, assert that a number of transcriptions and translations of the tablet were produced in this area, during this period, that indicate that they were products of such a meeting of ideas.

While some of these versions of the tablet did vary in superficial details, they were almost all in agreement on the important and overall content of the text. Again, legend, and to a certain degree academic thought, suggest that this is because the original tablet (or an agreeably reliable facsimile) existed in Alexandria during this period.

It should be noted, though, that whatever the source of the document might have been at the time of Alexander (and/or Balínús), the original document, said to have been written in

either in ancient Syriac or Phoenician, might then have been produced at least 2500 years before the tablet's 'modern' rediscovery.

The next significant event in the Western tradition's story of the tablet was its later discovery as part of Arab esoteric and scientific culture. The Roman Emperor Diocletian's burning of all the Egyptian and Greek alchemical literature that he could find, in 296 AD, and the fourth and final destruction of the library of Alexandria by Emperor Theodosius I in 391 AD, left post Roman Empire Europe all but completely cut off from the accumulated written wisdom of the ancient world for the next 500 years. The primary record of the earliest traces of the tablet we therefore had access to were those that were preserved by the Arab intellectual community.

Scholarly and academic opinions on the history of these Arab versions of the tablet are somewhat confused, and so it takes something of an effort to unravel a relatively coherent version of their story, from the flotsam of introduced or reproduced error. By comparing academic opinion with Hermetic tradition I believe we come up with a somewhat plausible picture of the later history of the document. That story goes something like this ...

Somewhere between 332 BCE (when Alexander the great conquered Egypt) and 100 AD (near the end of Apollonius' life), possibly either Alexander the Great and/or Apollonius of Tyana (Balínús) found both the Emerald tablet and a book that in Arabic was called the Kitáb al-'Ilal (The book of Causes). The following account of one of the Balínús versions of that discovery was recorded in the introduction to the Sirr al-Khalíqa (The Secret of the Creation of Nature) circa 800 AD. It relates how Balínús allegedly discovered both the tablet and the 'Book of Causes' while exploring a crypt beneath a statue of Hermes:

“Thus, I found myself across from an old man seated upon a golden throne who was holding in his hand an Emerald Tablet on which was written: “Here is the craft of nature.” And in front of him was a book on which was written: “Here is the secret of creation and the science of the causes of all things.” With complete trust I took the book [and the Tablet] and went out from the crypt. Thereafter, with the help of the book, I was able to learn the secrets of creation, and through the Tablet, I succeeded in understanding the craft of nature.”

Balínús is said to have transcribed and translated the original ‘book of causes’, to which he appended a translation of the Emerald tablet, in to his native language – Syriac. The title of his book in Arabic reads Kitab Sirr al-Khalíqa (The Secret of Creation). If such a book existed it would probably have been produced some time between 3-97 AD (during Apollonius’ life time).

It would then be roughly 500 years before the next translation of this book, and its version of the tablet, were produced. A Christian monk from Neapolis in Palestine named Sájiyús tells us that he had himself made a translation of the Kitab Sirr al-Khalíqa, we assume from Syriac in to Arabic. Modern scholarship suggests this probably happened some time after 650 AD. That work reached the condition we know it in today (it was added to over time), somewhere close to or before 833 AD. Scholarly opinion claims there is no doubt that the original from which this 9th century Arabic version of the work was copied, was written in Syriac. Some scholars had thought that this version of the text was written by Jábir ibn Hayyán (Gerber), but he himself insisted it was not, and that it had been copied from an original by Balínús.

Around the same period that the Arab version of the book by Sájiyús was produced, Jábir wrote a work called the Kitáb Ustuqus al-Uss (the 2nd Book of the Elements of Foundation), in which he included his own version of the Emerald tablet:

The Jábir version

-Balínús mentions the engraving on the table in the hand of Hermes, which says:

-Truth! Certainty! That in which there is no doubt!

-That which is above is from that which is below, and that which is below is from that which is above, working the miracles of one.

-As all things were from one.

-Its father is the Sun and its mother the Moon.

-The Earth carried it in her belly, and the Wind nourished it in her belly,

-As Earth which shall become Fire.

-Feed the Earth from that which is subtle, with the greatest power.

-It ascends from the earth to the heaven and becomes ruler over that which is above and that which is below.

-And I have already explained the meaning of the whole of this in two of these books of mine.

In 1923 a German academic by the name of Julius Ruska discovered Jábir's book, and his version of the tablet. Ruska then later discovered the Arabic translation of the Kitab Sirr al-Khalíqa which we are to believe was based on the monk Sájiyús' translation. Ruska's version of the tablet that we have today is therefore based on this earlier Sájiyús version:

The Ruska-Sájiyús version

-Here (is) a true explanation, concerning which there can be no doubt.

-It attests: The above from the below, and the below from the above - the work of the miracle of the One.

-And things have been from this primal substance through a single act.

-How wonderful is this work! It is the main (principle) of the world and is its maintainer.

-Its father is the sun and its mother the moon; the wind has borne it in its body, and the earth has nourished it.

-The father of talismen and the protector of miracles whose powers are perfect, and whose lights are confirmed,

-A fire that becomes earth.

-Separate the earth from the fire, so you will attain the subtle as more inherent than the gross, with care and sagacity.

-It rises from earth to heaven, so as to draw the lights of the heights to itself, and descends to the earth; thus within it are the forces of the above and the below;

-Because the light of lights is within it, thus does the darkness flee before it.

-The force of forces, which overcomes every subtle thing and penetrates into everything gross.

-The structure of the microcosm is in accordance with the structure of the macrocosm.

-And accordingly proceed the knowledgeable.

-And to this aspired Hermes, who was threefold graced with wisdom.

-And this is his last book, which he concealed in the chamber.

Ruska's Sájiyús translation of the tablet has been considered one of the oldest authoritative sources for the text for a long time, by many scholars. But we now know of a translation that claims to be an older source. In 1140 AD an individual by the name of Hugo de Santalla got his hands on a copy of one of the original Kitab Sirr al-Khalíqa by Apollonius. Hugo called his translation in to Latin De Secretis Naturae. This is considered the most accurate oldest surviving translation.

So far, Ruska's much later discoveries aside, we have looked at the history of one of the four major versions of the tablet that affected the early Western esoteric tradition. The other three versions came from the same source, a text called Kitab Sirr al-Asrar (The Book of Advice to Kings), possibly translated from Syriac by one Yahya ibn al-Bitriq, circa 800 AD.

The first of these three versions was a Latin translation by John of Seville, circa 1120 AD. John called his translation *The Secretum Secretorium*, and he decided to leave out the text of the tablet, that the original had included, from his translation. Nevertheless the famous Roger Bacon (13th century) produced a copy of the *Secretum Secretorium* and added his own version of the tablet to it. It has been suggested that Bacon's Emerald tablet was a version much preferred by medieval alchemists, and so played an important role (to a degree) in influencing the Western view of the text.

The second of these three latter versions was a Latin translation by Plato of Tivoli, circa 1140 AD. He titled his version of the book *Liber Hermetis de Alchimia*. This is considered to have been the most popular version with medieval alchemists. Finally, in 1243 AD Philip of Tripoli produced another Latin translation of the *Kitab Sirr al-Asrar* that we recognise as the fourth recension of the Emerald tablet to influence early Western occultism.

Today we have easy access to roughly ten well-known versions of the tablet. The Ruska translation, the Jabir ibn Hayyan version (Arabic), A twelfth century Latin version, the Georgio Beato translation (from the *Aurelium Occultae Philosophorum*). Later interpretations are almost certainly all based on these earlier translations – Issac Newton's version (1680), Kriegsmann translation (allegedly from Phoenician), Sigismond Bacstrom translation (allegedly from Chaldean), the Helena Blavatsky version, the Fulcanelli version (two translations in to English from French), and the Idres Shah version (possibly Sufi in origin) .

Bacstrom, while a respected Rosicrucian, provides an interpretation that smells too distinctly of the environment of 18th century occultism he frequented. Blavatsky suffers from the handicap of having no real alchemical knowledge or

experience and a bias towards a far Eastern (non-Hermetic) point of view. Fulcanelli's entire history is suspect, and Idres Shah, while being a modern writer on the subject of the Sufi tradition, hails from a very popular view of Sufism.

For the purposes of more closely analysing the Hermetic and alchemical meaning of the tablet here, I have produced my own adaptation, which I present below. I have based my interpretation on a consideration of all the well-known versions (including part of the Santalla version), tempered by my general knowledge of Hermetic philosophy and my experience in laboratory alchemy.

The Salfluere version

(1) This is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth:

(2) That which is above is like unto that which is below, and that which is below is like unto that which is above, in order to perform the miracles of the One.

(3) As all things were from the One, by mediation of the One, thus all things are born from the One, by adaptation.

(4) Its Father is the Sun, its Mother, the Moon, the Wind carries it in its belly, its Nurse is the Earth.

(5) It is the Father of all the creative systems of the whole world.

(6) Its power is perfected if it dwells in the Earth.

(7) Separate the Earth from the Fire, the volatile from the fixed, with care, patience and skill.

(8) It ascends from the Earth into Heaven and again it descends into the Earth, thus combining in itself the power of both that which is above and that which is below.

(9) In this way you obtain the glory of the whole World.

(10) Thus wise, it may, for you, illuminate the Darkness.

(11) It is the abode of the force of forces, because it overcomes all volatile things, and penetrates all fixed things.

(12) In this way are Worlds created.

(13) Hence the Great Work is effected, by this means.

(14) Therefore I am Hermes the Thrice Great, having the three parts of the philosophy of the World.

(15) What I have said concerning the operation of the Sun is complete.

ESSAY NINETY-ONE

The Emerald Tablet of Hermes - Part 2

My plan now is to devote one essay to each 'verse' of the tablet. Or maybe looking at two together, in one essay. Until I have picked apart every verse, and completed a full discussion of the whole tablet.

Verse 1.

"This is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth:"

This opening verse to the tablet sets the scene for us in a way I believe few people understand. The statement 'seems' straight forward ... that the author wants us to know that what follows is a truthful discourse. But this verse says more than simply that our author is being honest.

One of the core lessons Hermetism is designed to teach is that Hermetic philosophy is a universal philosophy. That the core principles of Hermetism can be applied to any branch of knowledge, and explain the essential structure and function of that branch of knowledge. At the same time at the core of this concept that Hermetism is a universal philosophy, is the idea that if it is possible to have a universal philosophy, then the principles upon which that philosophy are based can be described in a short formulaic statement, and that this short formula could be accurately applied to any subject in order to reveal the principle structure and function of that subject.

This is a fancy way of saying that at the heart of Hermetism lies the idea that Hermetic philosophy rests upon a formula that is a Grand Unified Theory of how everything in nature works.

This is a really important concept, and any student of Hermetism who wants to take Hermetism seriously will seek to

understand how and why it is that Hermetic philosophy could be founded on the idea that there is a single universal Grand Unified Theory which explains how everything in nature works.

Then, when it is understood how it might be possible for such a formula to exist, the serious student should approach the study of the Emerald Tablet with the hypothesis that it, itself, is that universal formula.

This is the idea that the first verse of the tablet is expressing. Our author is not simply saying ... hey what I'm about to tell you is true. He is also saying ... what I am about to tell you is the whole truth. In other words, it is the truth about everything that exists. That the following statements explain how everything in the universe is structured, and functions. At the same time our author is saying, the following statements I present in this tablet describe a complete truth ... there is nothing here which is extraneous. Everything I say is necessary to understanding the entire Grand Unified Theory which this formula explains.

This is 'The' Truth ... the key, core fact about reality.

This is The Whole Truth ... a complete formula

And nothing but The Truth ... and there is nothing extraneous in this formula.

In other words ... what follows is a Grand Unified Theory. A description in simple form of how everything is structured, and functions.

After all is said and done, when lab alchemy is properly understood, that discipline is designed to explain to the alchemist that amid all of the various ideas and practices that make up the lab tradition, behind it all there is a single concept ... a spagyric formula ... which forms the backbone of everything we do. In order to succeed in the lab work we must see that formula and understand it. Because it is the only process which will lead us to the Stone.

Once we approach the study of Hermetism from this understanding, we then can consider, that when we are trying to separate the false from the true, in information about alchemy, only those things that conform with the formula in the tablet can be true. In this way the tablet becomes our touch stone. Our measure of what is fact, and what is rubbish.

ESSAY NINETY-TWO

The Emerald Tablet of Hermes - Part 3

Verse 2

"That which is above is like unto that which is below, and that which is below is like unto that which is above, in order to perform the miracles of the One. "

This, the second verse of the emerald tablet, is probably the most well known and most often quoted part of its formula. Every western occultist has heard the idea ... as above, so below ... even if they haven't studied occultism enough to know the full quote, or where it comes from.

Four primary ideas are encapsulated in this verse. The first idea is that physical reality is a binary reality. This idea is shown in the concept 'above' and 'below'. Our author is setting out to basically say that our reality is constructed with an above-state and a below-state.

The ideas above and below are of course analogies. The author doesn't actually intend us to believe that our reality has a ground floor and a mezzanine floor, for example.

The second idea we are confronted with here is the idea that this 'above' has some kind of comparative relationship to the 'below'. They are not simply two completely different condition-places. They have a relationship, part of which is defined by the fact that there is some kind of similarity between them.

The third idea we see here is that besides this binary condition there is also a unitary condition. The author simply calls this 'The One'.

The fourth idea we see described here is that the binary condition exists so that The One can carry out some tasks, which are described as being miracles.

Here, in this verse, then, we see the concept I have discussed often, about a unitary state (1) that has created physical reality by dividing itself. Even though the tablet itself doesn't tell us that the unity state created the 'above and below' states, we know from qabala that this is how it is supposed to have happened. The above and below were created by The One so that it could accomplish some tasks, which are referred to as being miraculous. That is, that in order to make these amazing things happen, The One needs a two-state condition to carry out these tasks in.

At the same time we see that when this binary state was created, it wasn't just any old two chunks of stuff. These two states are 'like unto each other'. In other words, the two poles of this binary contain a third thing, a condition where they are related. A similitude. A bridging condition. Something that allows them to have a relationship, assuring that they are not completely dislocated and disconnected.

This reminds us of something the old alchemists often said about the three Principals ... that two of them had an antipathy between them. That they were opposites. But that the third Principal was the thing that allowed them to connect. It was a commonality between the two poles.

When looking at an overview of the information that the tablet presents us with, this second verse not only tells us reality is binary, that its poles are related, and that a unity exists, but this second verse is laying the foundation for what comes next in its discourse. It is saying that binary reality is created to make certain kinds of stuff happen, and next in the tablet's dialogue we are going to see the author's description of

the 'mechanism' by which this stuff, these miraculous events, come about.

ESSAY NINETY-THREE

The Emerald Tablet of Hermes - Part 4

Verse 3

"As all things were from the One, by mediation of the One, thus all things are born from the One, by adaptation."

Verse three begins by telling us that everything originates in One-Thing. That is, in unity. A mysterious condition that exists behind physical reality (the binary universe), which is the ground-state from which physical reality (the two-thing) arises.

In the lab alchemical tradition this original source ground-state (which is invisible), has a corresponding substance in physical reality which mimics this original source state. The physical vehicle for this unified source state has been called many things, but in lab alchemy its technical name is 'chaos'.

The most important characteristic of the universal chaos is that within it there are four 'conditions' existing in potential. But these four conditions are so vague, rarefied and mixed up together, that this chaos appears to be One-Thing only.

When contemplating the first part of verse three, we must remember that the old Adepts tell us that 'all things' are composed of Four Elements, and that the first part of verse three explains that 'all things' come out of the One-Thing ... just as in the process of creation (according to all of the primary ancient creation myths), the Four Elements, at the moment of creation, were extracted out of chaos.

The next piece of verse three tells us that 'all things' were produced out of the One-Thing by mediation of that same One-Thing. To mediate is to be at the middle of two opposing things. This tells us that in order for the One-Thing to produce all-

things, it had to take Its unity and divide It in to two uneven portions, and then create a condition between those unequal portions that would serve as a bridge ... or mediator. The implication here is that in order for The-One to create, it first has to create an equal pair from itself, and that pro-creation is only possible through the unifying of those two unequal-halves.

The last part of verse three tells us that in the act of creating all-things, through the act of mediation (reconciling two unequal parts), all of the things which are created from this pro-creative act are 'born' by adaptation. Adaptation is the act of changing some-thing into something else (or modifying the original thing), in order to suit new conditions.

We know that the original One-Thing state cannot do what the The-Thing needs. So the One-Thing had to create a new condition, one which is a two-thing state, in order to effect the things It requires. Part of this requirement is to pro-create (multiply). So the final part of verse three tells us that all things are born from out of the unity-state (created through binary interaction), 'by adaptation'. That is, the 'One' adapts the two-state and then the One creates all things (gives birth to them), by adapting Itself (Its-oneness) to the two-thing state.

Verse three is important because it describes, in every tight terminology, how all things originate in a unity-state, and that this unity-state changes itself in order to enter physical reality (binary existence). Understanding these concepts is necessary if we are to grasp how the lab process itself 'begins'. Because the lab process mimics, microcosmically, the same process as universal creation. If we want to understand how to begin the lab work, we therefore need to understand how the old Adepts saw this creation process being acted-out in the flasks in their labs. What actual lab processes were involved, and what actual substances were used, and their relationship to the creation theory, which is neatly presented here in verse three.

We must know what the physical expression of the unity-chaos is. We must know what operation to perform on it in order to cause it to 'adapt' from unity into the binary state. Then we must know what operations to perform in order to give birth to the Four Conditions, separated, that are the creation of all things.

At the start of the alchemical process there is no point in taking any old 'chemical' and carrying out any old chemical operations on it. In order for our process to 'be' alchemy it must mimic the process the old Adepts saw as being a simulacrum of the universal process. If we do not follow this same methodology, whatever we are doing, it is not 'alchemy'. So the old Adepts were very clear. In order to reach the final goal of the Great Work, we must follow the method of nature ... that is, of creation.

ESSAY NINETY-FOUR

The Emerald Tablet of Hermes - Part 5

Verse 4

"Its Father is the Sun, its Mother, the Moon, the Wind carries it in its belly, its Nurse is the Earth."

After the second verse this, the fourth, has got to be the most well known and oft quoted piece of the Emerald Tablet.