

The Way of Alchemy

Introduction

Anon

In this present day and age man approaches the Unknown in the name of Science with an analytical mind, which reaches the point where specialists of different disciplines are at a loss to communicate to those other than their own. Science is reaching an unprecedented degree of differentiation where detail is the name of the game, with the result being an unsystematic piecemeal unfolding of knowledge of the cosmos. But the almost forgotten root of exoteric and esoteric knowledge is alchemy.

Encountered in the practise of alchemy is the conjunction of philosophy and laboratory practice, science and art, the objective with the subjective. Whoever understands the fundamentals of alchemy will understand the essence of all else, as all things are seen from the inside rather than the countless outer forms and diversities of nature - in fact, the forest is seen, not only the trees. From this point of view all knowledge becomes systematized, in alchemy, into Unity. That which enables the unity to unfold is Spirit - a primary concern of alchemists. When art is based on the dynamic symmetry and harmonies characterizing the forms of nature, when science sees the natural kingdoms (including mineral) as living, and respects them as such, then this spirit is approached. It has been said that alchemy is evolution of spirit, and evolution is the raising of vibratory rates - recalling that *'all is vibrating; all is in motion'*, as put forth in the Kybalion. (The Kybalion by Three Initiates)

The predicament of man at present is a sorry one, perhaps typified by our urge to utilize nuclear energy with a questionable moral maturity in accepting the responsibility involved. On an individual level our lives are dogged by psychological and physical malaise, all because we have forgotten our true heritage - our true spiritual selves. It is through evolution, or alchemy, that we realize (ie make real) our potential Godhood according to, and within the laws that Nature herself utilizes. Nature brings her creations to a pre-ordained state of perfection through the processes of birth, death and rebirth (*Solve et coagula*), which has the effect of raising the vibratory rate of the entity towards an awareness of its own wholeness. While Nature unaided works over an immense expanse of time, the alchemist imitates these processes, but condensing greatly the time factor. The natural world is separable into three kingdoms of varying relative vibratory rates, from vegetable to animal, with the mineral kingdom the uppermost. The vibratory rate of a specimen from Nature is raised in the outer laboratory, and is then used by the alchemist to raise his own vibratory rate (ie give and take) with the agency of metals in the mineral kingdom representing the final stages.

The literary trend at present which poses alchemy as purely psycho-spiritual denies the validity of its cornerstone law, *'as above, so below'*. If transmutation can occur on the psycho-spiritual level, it can certainly occur on the physical level as the principles involved are identical. Alchemists observe that the fruit of perfection is contained within the seed, and it is this 'seed' that is focused on in the laboratory, being sagaciously separated from its Impure and often toxic 'husk', purified and integrated by the sensitive use of the four elements to bring forth a transmuted, perfected substance, reborn at a higher vibratory rate. Spirit has been grounded in Matter.

Modern science postulated that the building blocks of the universe are the 102 or so 'elements', but Rutherford soon demonstrated otherwise, with the discovery of sub-atomic particles. What is knowledge now, has been, and probably will be in the future erroneous, as it is knowledge that is subject to change. It is Truth that is not. Alchemy asserts that the primary building block of the universe is the 'First Matter', remaining hidden in, but permeating all creation, perhaps known better by the name 'spirit' or archetype'. The hard-won truths of the alchemists have been promulgated in thousands of volumes in veiled language to confuse the uninitiated, and the logical extensions are staggering. One such extension has been the discovery of nuclear physics by exoteric scientists. Is it any wonder that the alchemists of old veiled their theory in practise to all but the worthy?

The attention of the majority has been focused on alchemy due to its claims of the transmutation of lead into gold. Let this be understood that this is possible, and has been witnessed and recorded by reliable persons many times. Such a power has been in the hands of those who have earned the 'Grace of God' with arduous years of meditation and labour over the furnace. It is the by-product of a selfless heart and the desire to alleviate the suffering of mankind by the preparation of powerful, but gentle elixirs, which enable the psycho-spiritual and physical health to be restored. The *raison d'être* of alchemy is the raising of vibrations, both in oneself and in the medications created in the outer laboratory - it is the search for perfection and the greater life of the Initiate.

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Most people on the spiritual path have experienced what has been described as 'highs', 'ecstasies' and mystical experiences, but in a relatively short space of time have completed a cycle, returning to consciousness of the physical and personality levels. A change in consciousness is reflected by changes in the physiology and structure of the body, but due to the inertia of the physical plane, the changes are minute. The changes in consciousness have to be repeated many times before they become stabilized in the physical vehicle which serves as an 'anchor', Alchemy is a path that works very much on the physical plane, utilizing natural elixirs to gradually transform the Body by purification, detoxification and regeneration, making it a suitable vessel to consciously receive the finest of vibrations that permeate the universe continuously, Transmutation is carried out simultaneously in the psyche (soul) of man, by the awareness and application of cosmic laws in daily life (such as the law of karma, as above so below, etc.), along with the internal use of elixirs for his own health, and the service he renders to his fellows by making available the medicines.

Basic Principles

The understanding of the basic principles of alchemy require neither a background in chemistry or medicine, or any other academia. The only requirement is a right motive and common sense. Alchemy utilizes very simple laws which are manifold in their application.

1 All is unity

Alchemists conceive the universe as being Divine and the manifestation of the one God. Nature and its laws are the very outer expression of the Godhead. In the words of The Kybalion, *'The All is Mind, the Universe is mental'*. The one God is best described in terms of the three essences (see below).

2 Duality

All manifestation exists by virtue of dual forces. Perception and conception can only exist where an object is relative to, and in contrast with another. Some specific examples are:

a) *'As above, so below'*. This is a great law having many applications. It is the law of correspondence of the planes, indicating that whatever exists and is created in the inner worlds (as well as celestial influences) is reflected simultaneously in the outer physical reality. Once this is accepted as a living law, the activity occurring on the inner psychic planes can be accurately ascertained by observation of the events, objects and relationships that come into outer life. True awareness of this law obliges us to take responsibility for every aspect of our lives. If an outer circumstance is felt to be inharmonious, then it can be changed effectively by inner plane work. *'As below, so above'* indicates that our outer actions have a corresponding effect on the inner planes (this leads to so-called Karma). Laboratory work, ie manipulation and regeneration of physical substances and elements, etc., leads to the transmutation of the corresponding psychic archetypes. Jung termed the Alchemists' concerns with physical matter, *'projections of the unconscious'* onto that matter, which is valid, but only halfway there.

b) *Polarity*. Everything consists of two polar opposites; everything has an opposite pole to itself, where the poles differ only in degree. A simple illustration is heat and cold, which are different degrees of the same thing temperature. Where does heat begin and cold end? What we see as hot and cold depends on the situation, so we may conclude that it is a matter of relativity. Manifestations of heat/cold, light/darkness, love/hate, fear /courage, good and evil are 'merely a form, variety and rate of vibration', as it is put in The Kybalion. It is possible to effect a change of one pole to another within this 'form, variety or rate of vibration'. It is the detested weakness in ourselves, that once transmuted become our very strengths, to push us on toward the One.

c) *Gender*. All creation, generation and regeneration is not possible without the male/female principles interacting. Every female contains a male principle, and every male, the female.

3. The Trinity

Of primary concern to the Alchemist are the three essentials, or great trinity which comprise all manifestation. In alchemical literature they are the much confused Mercury, Sulphur, Salt, and are often referred to as the Three-in-One.

- a) **Mercury** (Spirit) Mercury, to an Alchemist is the most important concept and physical essence. It is not to be confused with ordinary metallic mercury, and is known under a variety of names, such as Water of Life, Prima Material, Water of the Wise, Philosophical Mercury, Seed, Bird Without Wings, Heavenly Water and Azoth. In simple terms Mercury is, as everything is polar in nature:

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Kingdom	Physical Pole	Non-Physical Pole
Animal	Blood	Life-Force
Plant	Alcohol	Life-Force
Mineral	Alkahest	Life-Force

The blood, alcohol and alkahest serve as vehicles, in their respective kingdoms, of the life-force, thus when the alchemist works with these substances, he is working with living entities. Alkahest is described as an inflammable, clear, very volatile liquid which is contained wholly within the mineral. In the *Collectanae Chemica* (Anon), mercury is spoken of thus:

'All true philosophers agree that the first Matter of metals is a moist vapour raised by the action of the central fire in the bowels of the earth, which, circulating through its pores meets with the crude air, and is coagulated by it into an unctuous water adhering to the earth which serves it for a receptacle, where it is joined to a sulphur more or less pure and a salt more or less fixing, which it attracts from the air, and, receiving a certain degree of concoction from the central and solar heat is formed into stones and rocks, mineral and metals.

Hence it appears that the first Matter of metals is one thing and not many, homogenous, but altered by the diversity of places and sulphurs with which it is combined.'

Mercury is thus the archetypal idea of all entity, just as the idea of flower exists above and before the manifest flower (the seed contains the fruit) and Adam Kadmon exists above and before terrestrial man. In terms of gender, the Mercury is of feminine polarity (but contains within it certain masculine characteristics), symbolised by the moon.

b) Sulphur (Soul) Again, it must be understood that the sulphur referred to here is not common brimstone. The physical/non-physical polarity is:

Kingdom	Physical Pole	Non-Physical Pole
Animal	Oil	Consciousness
Plant	Oil	Consciousness
Mineral	Oil	Consciousness

It is the role of Sulphur to coagulate; and to concentrate the life-force in one physical location. The organisational aspect of Sulphur maintains the human organism with its different organs as one cohesive unit. Macrocosmically solar gravitational attraction sustains the orbits of the planets which maintains the harmony and rhythm of the solar system unit. In the *Collectanae Chemica* *'these three kingdoms do not indeed differ in their virtue nor the three sulphurs, as every sulphur has the power to coagulate its own Mercury; and every Mercury has a power of being coagulated by its own proper sulphur, and by none other which is a stranger to it.'*

Sulphur has the masculine polarity attributed to it, symbolised by the sun.

c) Salt (Body) Salt is the substance that exoteric science deals with exclusively, but it is not common table salt. It is the familiar salts of the mineral kingdom as well as the mineral ash of the plant and animal kingdoms. The non-physical polarity is the subtle vehicle, in all three kingdoms.

4. Four Elements

These are the four elements of the Sages - Fire (heat), Air (Gases), Water (Liquids), Earth (solids). Frater Albertus in *The Alchemists Handbook* says of the elements:

'Atoms are matterised, segmentary, entities of cosmic consciousness manifesting in one of the three elements of physical phenomena. ie solid, liquid, or gaseous. Atomic structures can be rearranged but the results will manifest in one of the three elements as mentioned changes being brought about through heat (the fourth). All motion is due to force and all force emanates from heat (energy), having its origin in universal plasma, which is a coagulation of gaseous, liquid and solid substance.

Heat or fire, as confusingly (yet understandably) misnamed in former times is another element. However, visible fire is combustion, a rearrangement of atomic structures and has its origin in either solid, liquid or gaseous combustible atomic structures. But solids . . . can be liquefied, and solids can become gases, and gases condense into liquids, science will reply. True, but this is as far as it will go. An ultimate end must be reached within the realm of these elements. It can only be one of the three at one time because all three are in

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one, namely heat, energy, the universal plasma. Anything that manifests to our senses does so within the three elements through the fourth.'

It is the art of manipulation of the elements that transforms the seed (in this, sense, the three essentials into the perfected fruit. Just as a seed in the garden needs the right proportions of each of the four elements to germinate, and grow, so do the alchemical elixirs. The above may be summed up by saying that:

"the law of polarity will reveal it self within the three essential that will be found within the four elements, wherein is found the quintessence which is not one of the four [elements] , but one of the three [essences]" (Parachemica Vol 3 No 1) The quintessence is mercury; the Prima Materia.)

5. The Seven Planetary Principles

This is a vast field that cannot be dealt with fully in this article. The seven planetary Principles or Rays are archetypes that permeate the cosmos on all planes and scales of existence simultaneously. The seven Principles constitute what may be considered to be the 'organs' on the physical, psychological, spiritual, microcosmic and macrocosmic) levels. To quote from Paracelsus (Life and Prophecies of Paracelsus by Franz Hartmann)

"Every organ in the human body is formed by the action of certain principles that exist in the universe, and the former attract the corresponding activity in the latter. Thus the heart is 'in sympathy with the elements of the sun . . . There are many stars in the great firmament of the universe and there are many germs (ie seeds) hidden in the little world of min, and the high influences the low and in the macrocosm and microcosm all things stand in intimate sympathetic relationship with each other for all are the children of one universal father.

If I have manna in my constitution I can attract manna from heaven. Saturn is not only in the sky but also deep in the earth and in the ocean. What is Venus but the Artemisia that grows in your garden? What is iron but Mars? That is to say Venus and Artemisia are both products of the same essence, and Mars and iron are both manifestations of the same cause. What is the human body but a constellation of the same powers that formed the stars in the sky? He who knows what iron is knows the attributes of Mars. He who knows Mars knows the quality of iron."

He clearly states elsewhere that the stars do not cause disease but an 'adverse' astrological influence will nurture the seed of a disease, both physically and psychologically, if it already exists. The above quotation illustrates the concept of each form in nature being primarily under the rulership of one of these archetypes which are for convenience named after the classical planets. This is of great importance in practical alchemy as it determines which substance is to be transmuted and for what purpose it is to be used. The table below gives some sample information of the seven principles:

Planet	Herbs	Metal	Day	Anatomy	'Vice'	'Virtue'
Sun	Camomile, eyebright	Gold	Sunday	Heart	Pride	Humility
Moon	Watercress, moonwort	Silver	Monday	Brain	Lust of flesh	Stability of Christos
Mercury	Valerian, liquorice	Mercury	Wednesday	Lungs	Envy	Benevolence
Venus	Mugwort, Valerian	Copper	Friday	Kidneys	Lewdness	Ennobling
Mars	Nettle, garlic	Iron	Tuesday	Gall bladder	Anger	Meekness
Jupiter	Dandelion, dock	Tin	Thursday	Liver	Cunning	Wisdom
Saturn	Comfrey, wintergreen	Lead	Saturday	Spleen	Avarice	Charity

NB Vice and virtue from Jacob Boehm, Anatomy from Paracelsus, and herbs from Frater Albertus

The above is a glimpse of an endless list of correspondences of the seven planetary principles. By the familiar maxim 'As above, so below – So below, so above' a herb, metal, or animal product of a Principle when transmuted, will have a corresponding effect, change in polarity within its own principle. For example, transmuted dandelion has the power to change the polarity of a diseased liver to a healthy one, and also to change a polarity of cunning to wisdom. This is a transformation of low vibration Jupiter to high vibration Jupiter.

Practise

All practical alchemy, whether performed psycho-spiritually in the 'inner laboratory', or the outer physical laboratory consists of only three processes. (a) separation (b) purification (c) cohobation, or combination. These processes will be illustrated by a hypothetical transmutation of a herb the lesser circulation; the herb having been collected (that portion containing the active healing agents) on the day governed by its

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planetary ruler and then dried and ground. The herb is separated into its three essentials (One becomes Three) (a) sulphur = oils, (b) mercury = alcohol, ethanol, (c) salt remaining dead body (*caput mortem*), and each of these three essences are separately purified by distillation or an open flame, as appropriate, and when pure, they are recombined (Three into One). The process of separation of alcohol ie life, from the herb indicates the death of the herb, the purification becomes the purgation, and cohobation is the rebirth, the culmination of the spagyric cycle. The herb is now a wax-like substance, which is solid at room temperature and liquid when warmed a small quantity of which is taken in water or wine on the appropriate day. Herbs of all seven Principles used in conjunction provide a balanced, gentle regeneration of mind and body.

Conclusion

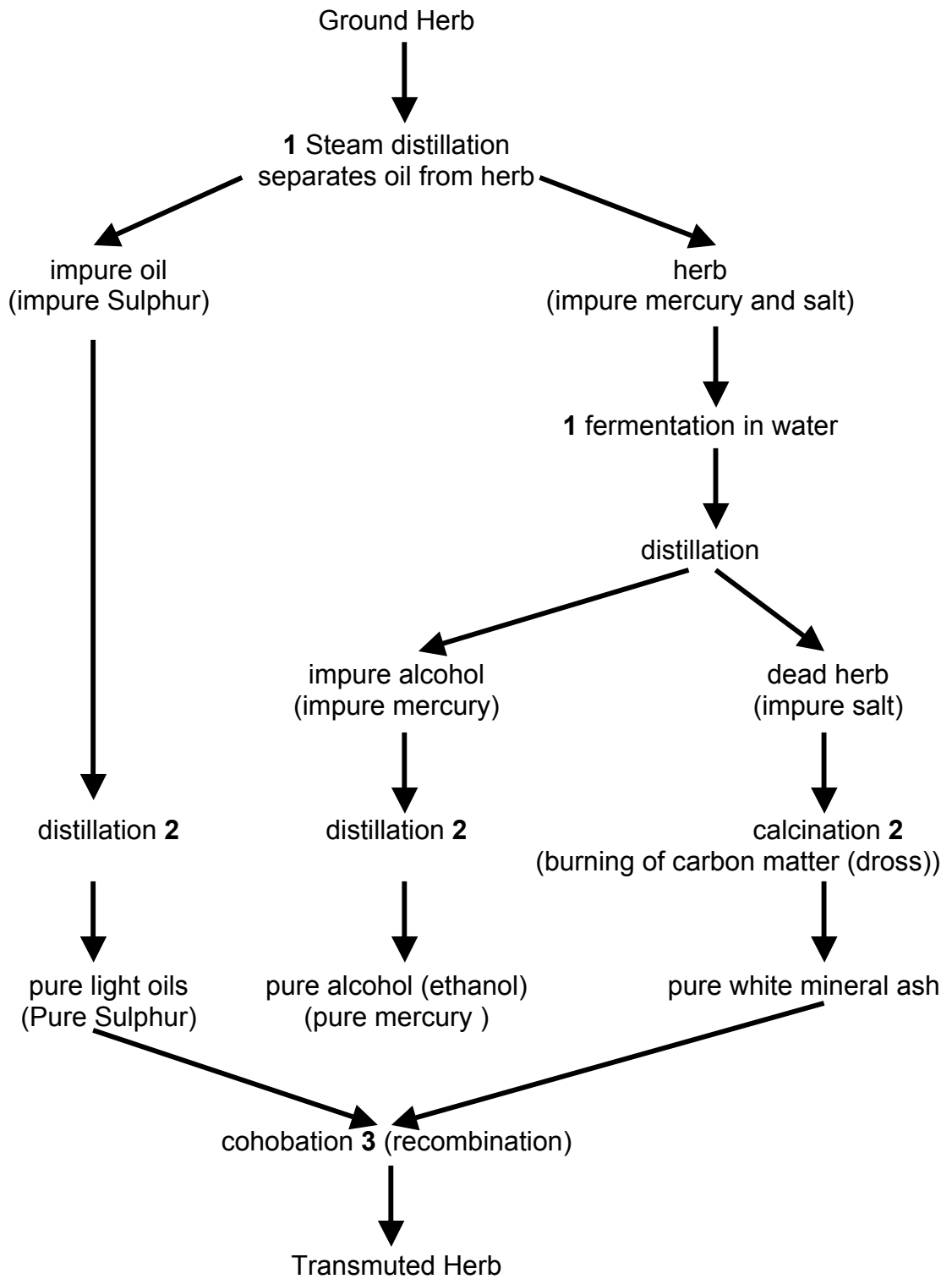
In alchemical practice the study of the time cycles of the seven Principles and astrology have primary functions a) cycles of the seven Principles provide information concerning the optimum times to perform the various laboratory procedures. b) Astrology is an invaluable guide in getting to know oneself and when correctly understood can clarify deeply rooted karmic problems to be confronted and transmuted in this lifetime. These problems come to a head under the influence of transits and progressions, and the knowledge of celestial influences frees one of being what appears to be the victim of external circumstances. Astrological factors also influence the timing of laboratory procedure.

The Qabalah provides the student of alchemy with a very thorough set of relationships between the various archetypes being explored and used. It is these relationships that combine in the pattern of the Tree of Life: the forming of a map of the micro and macrocosm.

To summarize: astrology reveals who you are; the Qabalah indicates where you are going; and alchemical practise provides the means for getting there.

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- 1. refers to separation
- 2. to purification
- 3. to cohobation