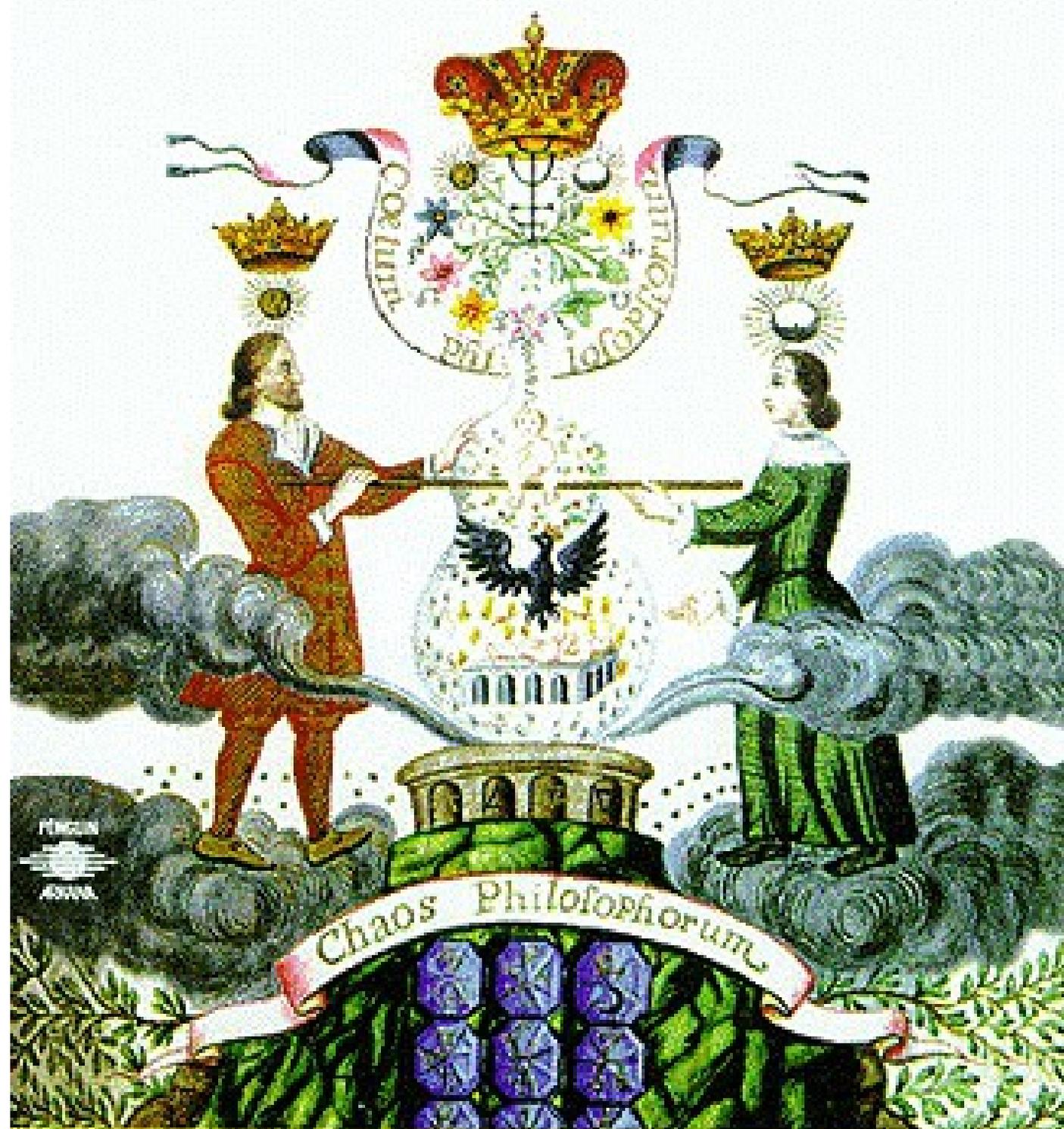


The Emerald Tablet

ALCHEMY OF
PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION



DENNIS WILLIAM HAUCK

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Dennis William Hauck is an internationally known authority on spiritual and mystical experiences. One of the world's few practicing alchemists, he writes and lectures on the stages of personal transformation to a wide variety of audiences, including scientists, business leaders, and Christian and New Age groups. A professional member of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology and the Institute for Noetic Sciences, he is a translator of old alchemy manuscripts and the author of several books dealing with mystical and paranormal experiences, including *Haunted Places: The National Directory* (Penguin). Hauck resides in Sacramento, California, and maintains a website at www.AlchemyLab.com.



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TRANSFORMATION



Dennis William Hauck



PENGUIN/ARKANA



ARKANA

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Putnam Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Books Ltd, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices:

Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

First published in Arkana 1999

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The Alchemy of a Voluntary Society by Stephan Hoeller (Quest Books, 1992). By permission of the publisher.

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“Spiritual Breakthroughs in Sex” by Dell Sokol appearing in *Enlightened Sexuality* edited by Georg Feuerstein (Crossing Press, Freedom, CA, 1989). By permission of Dell Sokol.

Interview with François Trojani by Joseph H. Rowe, *Gnosis Magazine*, Summer 1996, No. 40. By permission of Joseph H. Rowe.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Hauck, Dennis William.

The emerald tablet : alchemy for personal transformation / Dennis William Hauck.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

eISBN : 978-1-101-15718-3

1. Hermetism—History. 2. Hermes, Trismegistus. I. Title.

BF1611.H455 1999

135'.45—dc2I 98-30840

<http://us.penguin.com>

Introduction



In recent years, fictional accounts about the rediscovery of ancient spiritual insights have become overnight bestsellers. These stories strike a chord in people weary of a commercialized world in which endless materialistic striving seems to be the highest aspiration. As we approach the new millennium, many of us are fed up, eager to move toward a more spiritual culture on earth. *But what if there really were an ancient Science of Soul designed for achieving spiritual perfection in very specific and comprehensible steps and whose only goal was to accelerate the evolution of mankind's spiritual nature?*

Not only does such a science exist, it is based on a single document whose origin is lost in legends that go back over 10,000 years. Called the Emerald Tablet because it was molded out of a single piece of emerald or green crystal, it carries a powerful message full of hidden meaning and prophetic depth. According to some reports, the wondrous tablet was translated by Alexandrian scholars and actually put on display in Egypt around 330 B.C.E. One of the most mysterious documents ever put before the eyes of man, the Emerald Tablet has been described as everything from a succinct summary of Neoplatonic philosophy to an extraterrestrial artifact or gift from Atlantis. The text is written in extremely generic terms and is the uncredited inspiration for many of our spiritual and religious traditions. Its most obvious legacy is at least seventeen centuries of alchemy, a period in which some of the most creative minds in the world delved into the intertwined mysteries of matter, energy, soul, and spirit.

My initiation into the lore of the tablet came while I was still a graduate student at the University of Vienna. In the seventeenth century, Vienna and nearby Prague served as the European center for the study of alchemy, and hundreds of alchemical manuscripts were written there. I spent untold hours paging through those arcane treatises, trying to figure out what the alchemists were talking about and searching for the meaning of the bizarre drawings that illustrated their ideas. I soon realized that the common source for all the practical and metaphysical work of the alchemists was the Emerald Tablet. My research into the origins of the tablet took me throughout Europe and down a path that led all the way back to ancient Egypt. Along the way, I

uncovered previously unknown versions of the Emerald Tablet and made some amazing discoveries, including an encrypted chemical formula within the tablet and evidence of its connection with the Grail legends. Gradually, I became convinced that our mystical and religious visions originate in a hidden reality that the Emerald Tablet not only describes but shows us how to access.

As we enter a new cosmic cycle, that hidden reality is being witnessed by increasing numbers of honest and intelligent people in mystical and paranormal encounters but which are, in fact, glimpses of another side to reality that modern civilization has rejected and tried to ignore. The Emerald Tablet works on many levels and instructs us in a world view that encompasses all the different facets of reality—not just our everyday world and the two cultures of science and religion that dominate our society, but also the ineffable forces that control our physiological, psychological, and spiritual development. I believe, as did the ancients, that the Emerald Tablet is a divinely inspired document that contains an important message—something wonderful—for all of mankind.

However, the multiple layers of meaning and interpretation built into the tablet make it anything but simple for the uninitiated to work with. The intuitive approach adopted here guides the reader through the tablet's many mysteries until it comes alive, so he or she can directly experience the magic of its principles and apply them successfully. This book is a personal testimony to the power of alchemy as well. Using examples from my own life and from those of other people both famous and unknown, I have attempted to expose the hidden but constant alchemy of our lives.

The material in this book is organized into three parts. The first section is dedicated to a true understanding of the ancient message contained in the Emerald Tablet. Through examples of persons who, over the ages, have unleashed the tablet's powers, each part of the document is scrutinized to reveal its complete meaning. Then the entire content of the tablet is envisioned in a single remarkable engraving from the early seventeenth century. In the second part, the recipe upon which all alchemy is based, the Emerald Formula, is revealed and elaborated on with specific techniques on how to apply each step. The goal is for the reader to personally experience the renewed energy and amazing synchronicities unleashed by transmuting the lead of one's innermost being into gold. The final part of this book

scrutinizes what the Emerald Tablet tells us about our future and about how we came to be where we are now. We will examine the alchemy of the millennium as well as the meaning of increased sightings of the Stone—an emerging pattern being reported throughout the world.

What is the Emerald Tablet really? In simplest terms, it is a scientific document that actually *works* with something we perceive as metaphysical in nature, thus presenting a spiritual technology for the human race. It shows mankind how to consciously work together with the forces of evolution, and gives individuals the opportunity to transform themselves outside the inherently imperfect and artificial structures of schools, church, and government. The Emerald Tablet offers each one of us the chance not only to directly participate in the quantum leap in consciousness that can safely lead us into the third millennium, but also to do so as real people true to ourselves and in accord with the Soul of the Universe.

The author welcomes correspondence from individuals interested in or working through the principles of the Emerald Tablet. Write to him at: D. W. Hauck, P.O. Box 22201, Sacramento, CA 95822- 0201 or visit his website (www.AlchemyLab.com).



Part 1

UNDERSTANDING THE EMERALD TABLET



Chapter 1

GIFT FROM THE GODS

Over the centuries, many esteemed philosophers have declared that the Emerald Tablet contains the sum of all knowledge, and a handful of seekers have reported actually seeing and touching the mysterious gemstone tablet. But few embraced its principles more thoroughly than a sixteen-year-old boy by the name of Balinas. From the moment he ran his fingers across the bas-relief lettering on the crystalline object, he recognized the all-encompassing force it contained. Transformed by the truths it revealed, the lonely boy became one of the world's greatest healers and most enlightened men.

Born in the year 16 C.E. in Tyana, Cappadocia (part of what is now Turkey), Balinas was different from other children from the start. Remarkable for both his "great beauty" and powerful memory, the precocious lad approached life like an empty cup constantly needing to be filled, though his intense need for absolute truth soon became a burden to his parents and teachers. His father even suspected that his son suffered from some acquired malady, and took him at an early age to various priests and healers. When the child exhibited his ability to converse on any subject in several different languages, the authorities publicly proclaimed him an incarnation of Proteus, the shape-shifting god of the Greeks. That, of course, was not what his father expected to hear, and although no one could say exactly when it happened, he eventually just stopped talking to his son. The rejected boy started referring to himself as an orphan and took to wandering the streets of Tyana like a beggar, desperately seeking a mentor who knew how to reach him.

One day, the boy came upon a marble statue set on a gilded column near the edge of town. The monument itself was very old, and though the common language was then Aramaic, the writing on the statue was in the original Syrian alphabet. As the boy gazed up at the imposing figure on the pedestal, something in the ancient man's eyes caught his interest. It was as if the man knew everything. On a plaque halfway up the column were the words: "Behold! I am Hermes Trismegistus, he who is threefold in wisdom. I once placed these marvelous signs openly before all eyes; but now I have veiled them by my wisdom, so that none should attain them unless he become a sage

like myself.” Further up, a breastplate declared: “Let him who would learn and know the secrets of creation and nature, inquire beneath my feet.”¹

The boy fell to his knees and looked up into the man’s proud face. Here stood the tutor he had longed for, someone beyond the folly and exaggeration of the world, someone who knew the higher truths the boy sensed intuitively. The lad’s large dark eyes swelled up with tears, and he whispered: “Teach me, Hermes!” The wise old man carved in stone became the father the boy so desperately needed, and he spent many evenings conversing with the cold marble as if it were a real person.

When Balinas was fourteen, his frustrated parents interrupted his mystical tutoring and sent him south to Tarsus to pursue more formal studies. But the boy soon grew restless, and, calling the Tarsians “frivolous,” moved to Aegae in Greece, hoping to find someone acquainted with the secret teachings of Hermes. There he discovered the writings of Pythagoras, who was said to be directly descended from the great Hermes. At last Balinas felt he was making progress. At age sixteen, he returned to Tyana, drawn by the idea that he was now ready to complete his apprenticeship at the foot of the statue. Balinas went to the marble god just before sunrise, and, kneeling before him, beseeched Hermes to share his great truths once and for all. The first rays of sunlight fell on the polished brass breastplate: “Let him who would learn and know the secrets of creation and nature, inquire beneath my feet.”

Like a flash of lightning, the boy grasped the cryptic message and felt like a fool for not having seen it sooner. He jumped to his feet and started digging feverishly beneath the massive stone block at the base of the column. By noon he had uncovered the entrance to an underground chamber. Though the sun shone brightly overhead, the cavern was so dark that not a single ray of light penetrated it. The scrawny lad slipped easily through the narrow opening, but once inside, he was enveloped by fierce winds that arose from nowhere and blew in all directions without ceasing. No torch would burn under those conditions and the pitch blackness prevented him from going any further.

Disappointment and gnawing chagrin kept Balinas from sleeping that night. What was in the cave? Did it contain the secrets promised by Hermes, or was it just a natural formation? How would he ever find out what was in there? In the middle of the night, Balinas returned to the statue and eventually

fell asleep, leaning against the column where he had spent so many hours “listening” to the teachings of Hermes. His head propped against the cool stone, the boy dreamt of an old man standing next to the opening of the cave. The man looked familiar, but it was not Hermes.

“Oh, Balinas,” the man called out. “Rise, and enter into this chamber to gain knowledge of the secrets of creation, so as to obtain a true representation of nature!”

“I can see nothing in that darkness,” replied Balinas, “and the winds that blow there put out every flame.”

“Balinas! Put your light into a glass vessel!” suggested the man. The boy had never seen such a lantern, but he knew at once the idea would work.

“Who are you that allows me to profit from your favor?” asked the savvy boy.

And the man said: “I am your own being, perfect and subtle.”

Then Balinas awoke, full of joy. He set a torch inside a glass, just as the man had said, and entered the chamber shortly after sunrise the next day. The chaotic winds still blew and nearly knocked him off his feet, but the lantern stayed lit and guided him deep into the rocky cavern. Before long, the winds abated, and he caught sight of a dancing light ahead, the reflection of his own lantern off a shiny object in front of him. As the boy approached, he could hardly believe his eyes.

Before him stood a golden throne and, seated in it, the mummified corpse of Hermes wearing the remains of a fine embroidered coat. Balinas froze in front of the corpse and stared into the leathery, bearded face of Hermes. The sound of the teenager’s thumping heart filled the chamber. Resting in Hermes’ lap was a green-colored tablet that glowed eerily in the dim light. The dead man’s stiff fingers clutched it tightly, and the boy stepped forward and touched the tablet’s smooth, protruding letters. Still marveling at the object’s precision and beauty, Balinas stumbled over a pile of books lying at the man’s feet. In the stack were four books, written by Hermes, and he carefully picked up and opened each one. The first three books contained advanced instruction in mathematics and astronomy. The last book carried the inscription, “This is the secret of the creation and the knowledge of the causes of all things.” That fourth book elaborated on the meaning of the Emerald Tablet, which revealed a hidden relationship between man and the universe. “The fourth book,” Balinas wrote later, “is the noblest of all and

contains powerful and terrible signs that teach the first elements of the visible things created by God, so that he who reads this book may, if he chooses, be successful in realizing such wonders.”²

Balinas went back to the cave many times and studied the books of Hermes with an open heart. It soon dawned on him that all living things were part of the same universal life force described in the mysterious tablet, and he pledged never to harm any potential “vehicle of light.” He immediately renounced the eating of meat or the ritual sacrificing of animals and refused to use animal products or even wear leather goods. He started wearing only linen garments and shoes made of tree bark. What is more, he gradually acquired the amazing ability to understand the chirping of birds and other animal sounds, and, indeed, to speak all human languages without having learned them. He understood people’s silence as well and seemed to know the innermost thoughts of any person he met.

Realizing that the transcendent truths revealed in the wondrous tablet and in the fourth book were beyond the grasp of reason, beyond mere words, Balinas took a vow of silence. The enlightened youth wanted to make sure his initiation was complete before he went out into the world, while at the same time demonstrating to others that there existed a higher level of understanding, achieved through silence. He attempted to communicate only through gestures, the expression of his eyes, and projected feelings. Though many ridiculed and made fun of him, he would not speak a word for the next five years. “We should make use in relation to the divine being solely of the higher speech,” he explained later, “and I mean that which issues not by the lips. From the noblest of beings we must ask for blessings by the noblest faculty we possess, and that faculty is Mind, which needs no organ.”

Balinas returned to Aegae and lived in the temple of Asclepius, the Greek god of healing who was an alleged son of Hermes. The caduceus, or Staff of Hermes, was displayed on the outside of the temple, and it was inside the great hall that Balinas applied the principles of the Emerald Tablet. He soon gained a reputation as a great healer and holy man, and the sick and infirm journeyed from throughout Greece to experience the youth’s uncanny power to heal through his presence alone. Balinas’s fame grew so much that a saying about him became a proverb in Cappadocia: “Where are you hurrying?” people would ask anyone in a rush. “Are you off to see the

youth?” To those who had the good fortune to witness the healings and casting out of demons, it seemed as if Balinas concentrated on purifying the patients themselves in order to force the illness or unwelcome spirit to take flight. On several occasions, his silent, purifying presence even quelled riots. Once, his mere appearance at a violent confrontation between the cities of Pamphylia and Cilicia defused the situation in a matter of minutes.

At the age of twenty, Balinas received a considerable inheritance on the death of his father. His mother had died years before, so he gave his share of the inheritance to his brother. Balinas felt he must remain free from worldly attachments and would never accept or even carry money. Later, when admirers offered him huge sums of cash, he insisted they give it to the poor. For him, the most detestable of all crimes was to take money for invoking or giving instruction about the higher powers which the Emerald Tablet had shown him how to control.

When he was twenty-one, Balinas decided it was time to go out into the world and spread the doctrine of initiation he had learned from Hermes. After his five years of silence, he declared: “The whole earth is mine, and it is given me to travel through it.” With those words, Balinas began a trek that made him one of the greatest travelers of his time. Historians recorded his presence throughout Greece, Persia, and Egypt. He traveled through North Africa, into Spain and Europe, and even journeyed to India. During his travels, Balinas sought out many small religious groups, such as the Essenes and Therapeuts, and taught them the true nature of spiritual initiation. He felt that religious groups tended to lose sight of their connection with the powers above, and he tried to reestablish that vital link. He was especially troubled by the tendency of organized religions to become materialistic, and, to set an example for others, he never entered a temple or church without uttering the prayer, “Grant, Oh gods, that I may have little and feel the need of nothing.”

In the sanctuaries of those various sects, Balinas left behind metal or gemstone talismans charged with his own spiritual energy. In doing so, he hoped to physically restore the active, living force necessary for the spiritual health of the groups. Though he had a very cosmopolitan view of religion and never favored one group over another, it is known that at the larger cults and traditional temples in cities, he persistently tried to change the ceremonies and liturgy to reflect the ancient mystical tradition handed down by Hermes. That Hermetic tradition emphasized the existence of a supreme force called

the One Thing, which has no perceptible form until it is “grounded” or expressed in material reality. The expression of that force is guided by the One Mind, the mind of the supreme being, and is a process responsible for the creation of the universe. The Hermeticists saw the One Thing as a primordial, plastic energy that takes the form of the idea or thought projected by the One Mind. The unseen force can be contacted and controlled by mankind through divine union—a merging with the One Mind in meditation and prayer. Lasting union can only occur through a transformation of the body and mind, until the terrestrial man is so refined and purified that he becomes a vehicle solely for this force. Religious leaders throughout the ages were in contact with this power, though they stated their personal perspectives or creeds in many different ways.

Balinas taught that just as the One Thing exists in the universe, so is it mirrored within each of us. That immortal presence, the part of matter known as soul, evolves through many reincarnations as it seeks perfect expression, and man is only a temporary carrier of something with a greater purpose. In other words, the One Thing is the big picture, not the individual who is born and dies. Trying to explain this cycle of birth and rebirth, Balinas said:

When the body is exhausted, the soul soars to the space above, full of contempt for the harsh, unhappy slavery it has suffered. But really, what are these things to you? You will know when you are no more. It is the way of everything here in the world below that when it is filled out with matter it is visible, but it is invisible, owing to its subtlety, when it is rid of matter. Then why this false notion of birth and death? Why has this false notion remained so long without being refuted? Some foolishly believe that what has happened through them they have themselves brought about. They are ignorant that the individual is brought to birth *through* his parents, not *by* them. The real change which comes to an individual is not caused by his visible surroundings but rather is a change in the One Thing which is in every man.

Thus, the only way to change our true situation, to be set free from the endless cycle of birth and rebirth, is to identify with our immortal essence—the One Thing—instead of concentrating on transitory illusions like material possessions, wealth, appearance, fame, or power over others. Moreover, the One Thing within us and the One Thing of the whole universe are really the same—just as the One Mind within us and the One Mind of the universe

become the same in meditation. Through these correspondences between the Above and the Below, mankind can know and live in absolute truth. That was the message of the Emerald Tablet.

Wherever he went, Balinas followed a strict regimen to maintain his contact with those hidden realities. His only clock was the sun, and his spiritual practices coincided with the operation of the sun, which for the followers of Hermes symbolized the ultimate supreme being, the perfect union of the One Mind with the One Thing. Balinas believed that the higher powers were most accessible in the hour before dawn, during which time he entered his deepest meditation. Every morning, he was there to greet the sun and absorb its energies. On the physical level, the sun represented the all-pervasive One Thing, and he meditated to accumulate its purifying power within his own body. On the spiritual level, the light of the sun was a manifestation of the One Mind, and he attempted to unite his own consciousness with it.

Later in the morning, Balinas practiced the seven-stepped initiation prescribed by the Emerald Tablet. At temples and shrines, he would also use this time to instruct the priests in the Hermetic Mysteries. At noon, when the sun shone directly overhead, he meditated again to store up the mutable force and maintain his connection to the One Mind. He spent his afternoons working with the general public, healing with the energy he had accumulated and discussing the hidden truths of which everyone should be aware. At sunset, he meditated once again, to review the day's events from the highest perspective he could obtain and to crystallize their truths within him. He spent his evenings distilling the wisdom of the day, making of it "a sort of permanent state of inspiration." Since he ascribed immense importance to the power of imagination in self-development, Balinas probably used this time to enter into an introspective conversation with his own soul in order to refine his deepest essence—a process the alchemists, who called themselves the "Sons of Hermes," would later describe as the creation the Philosopher's Stone.

Not surprisingly, when Balinas journeyed to India, he appreciated the emphasis the Brahmans placed on the practice of meditation. One of the first Greeks ever to go to India, Balinas had to adapt to new customs and diet, contend with roaming bands of thieves, and learn about animals and plants completely unknown in the Western world. His followers tried hard to

dissuade him from making the trip, and most abandoned him after he left. “I must go,” he explained, “withersoever wisdom and my inner self may lead me.”

India gave Balinas new hope for the world. “I saw men living on the earth and yet not on it,” he recalled, “defended on all sides, yet without fortifications, possessing nothing, yet having everything.” In a letter to one of his Indian hosts, he wrote: “By sharing with me your wisdom you have given me power to travel through heaven. These things will I bring back to the mind of the Greeks, and I will hold converse with you as though you were present.”

After Balinas returned from India, he traveled from town to town and spoke in the marketplaces and from the steps of temples. He attacked people’s laziness and overindulgence, pleading with them to share their possessions with those in need. “What else, then, have we to do,” he cajoled, “but shut ourselves up at home, like birds to be fattened for use, and indulge our appetites in darkness till we burst with fat?”

He also urged his audiences to stop wasting their time following Roman sporting events. Cruelty was a big part of the entertainment industry of the Romans, and it demanded the wholesale slaughter of thousands of humans and animals. On just the opening day of the Roman Games, 9,000 animals, including lions, tigers, and panthers, were massacred. The barbaric display attracted all tiers of Roman society, and Balinas stood alone in condemning it. Instead of seeking ever more spectacular entertainment, he told people, they should concentrate instead on raising their consciousness to a higher level so they might experience truth directly, for nothing is more exciting than the ongoing process of creation.

When he arrived in Athens to be initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries, Balinas received an overwhelmingly enthusiastic reception by the people. So great had his reputation become that the hierophant who led the ceremonies became jealous and refused to initiate Balinas, accusing him of being a sorcerer. The crowd was so upset that the hierophant recanted, but Balinas declined to participate under those conditions. Though he wanted to gain access to all mystical ceremonies to understand their underlying philosophies, he postponed his Eleusinian initiation and even prophesied the name of the hierophant who would initiate him four years later.

Balinas also used his growing influence on the rulers of the Roman

Empire to show them the emptiness of a strictly political viewpoint. Emperor Vespasian, Emperor Titus, and Empress Nerva all received his counsel and became known for their enlightened regimes. When Emperor Vespasian asked him what a good king should do, Balinas told him: “Count not wealth which is stored up—in what way is this superior to sand haphazardly heaped? Nor count that which comes from men who suffer beneath taxation’s heavy weight, for gold that comes from tears is base and blackened. You’ll use wealth best of any king, if you supply the needs of those in want and make their wealth secure for those who have it. And be fearful of the power to do whatever you please. Do not lop off the ears of corn that show beyond the rest and raise their heads, but rather weed their disaffection out like tares from corn and show your fear of stirrers-up of strife not in punishment but in saying that you will submit yourself to the law.”

While Balinas freely offered such sound advice, he never hesitated to attack decadent rulers. He fearlessly maligned Emperor Nero, who in turn charged him with high treason. However, at the trial, the charges against Balinas miraculously disappeared from the parchment as it was unrolled, and the tribunal was forced to release him. Later, Nero expelled him and all “philosophers” from Rome, but the relentless Balinas fled to Spain, where he helped plan the revolt that toppled the despot. Emperor Domitian, in another reign of terror, arrested Balinas on trumped-up charges and put him in chains in a dungeon. The seventy-year-old man miraculously slipped out of his restraints and began instructing his fellow prisoners in the art of meditative union that he learned from the Emerald Tablet, an art which, he promised, would open the door to complete freedom.

Piqued by the audacious philosopher, Emperor Domitian promptly set up a kangaroo court in which the emperor himself was the only judge, and the room was packed with influential citizens there to see the holy man punished. Balinas entered very calmly and slowly descended into a meditative state that swept over everyone present. Emperor Domitian became very confused, and, in an entranced voice, actually acquitted Balinas. At that very moment, the accused vanished from the courtroom. No one saw him leave the room or the grounds, and a close friend swore that Balinas had spent that entire day with him in Puteoli, nearly three days ride from Rome.

The ability of Balinas to be in two places at once was common knowledge among his closest associates. At such times, he would wrap

himself in a woolen blanket and assume a sitting position with both feet on the blanket. Then, as his meditation progressed, he slowly drew the heavy blanket over his head and face. He remained in that state for many hours at a time, presumably projecting his astral body to travel elsewhere. The impure woolen blanket, his one exception to the use of animal products, possibly aided in driving his soul from his body.

Justice for Emperor Domitian came years afterwards, when assassins paid by his wife stabbed him to death at their palace in Rome. At that same moment, Balinas, in the middle of giving a speech at Ephesus in Ionia, suddenly stepped back on the platform and cried out, “Strike! Strike! Strike! It is done—the tyrant is no more!” Regaining his composure, Balinas explained to his audience that he had experienced a vision of the emperor’s death as it occurred.



A caricature of Balinas depicts him wearing a fur and feather. (Meric Casaubon, A True and Faithful Relation, London 1659)

Because of his mystical powers and great learning, Balinas became known as Apollonius of Tyana, after the Greek sun god Apollo, bringer of enlightenment. Shrines and memorials to him spread throughout the Roman

Empire, and at his birthplace, on the site where he found the tablet, the citizens erected a great temple to him. Yet the ascetic sage insisted no one worship him and forbade his followers to set up any organizations. He preferred to be viewed not as a divine incarnation but as an example of how any man could share in the ever-present force described in the Emerald Tablet. His preference was simply to be known as “the Tyanean,” in deference to the city where his revelation took place. He denied being a soothsayer or prophet and condemned anyone who allied themselves with the hidden powers to perform magic. In his books and at public gatherings, he taught detachment from worldly affairs, purity of thought and action, tolerance of all life, and the existence of one supreme God above all other gods. He urged people to look inward, and held that the empire of man “lies not in the knowledge of things *without* but in the perfection of the soul *within*.” His primary message was that union with God, the One Mind of the whole universe, is possible for each of us. That One Mind is the same for everyone and can be found in meditation. In 98 C.E., as Balinas lay dying, he told a close friend: “Whenever you think on high matters in solitary meditation, you will find me.”

For a man who owned nothing, it seems strange that Balinas left behind a will. Instead of a list of material possessions, though, it contained a summary of the tenets of the Emerald Tablet, which he felt was his true legacy to the world. The actual circumstances surrounding his death were even more mysterious. His followers insisted that his body rose physically to heaven, and no trace of his corpse was ever found. Alchemists in later centuries interpreted this to mean Balinas transformed into the Philosopher’s Stone, the ultimate merging of mind and matter, the perfect fusion of the One Mind with the One Thing. On the other hand, a few historians have surmised that his disciples stole the body and entombed him in a secret cave, perhaps with the Emerald Tablet in his arms, just as he had found it clutched by Hermes. Maybe that is where the tablet sits today, waiting for the next initiate to “absorb” its wondrous message. However, the lore of the Emerald Tablet goes back even further than Balinas, and the Tyanean genius was not the first to discover the miraculous object in the arms of Hermes and pass its teachings down to succeeding generations.

¹ The inscription on the statue of Hermes is from a 934 C.E. copy of the Arabian *Book of Balinas the Wise on Causes*, which became known in

Europe as the *Book of the Secrets of Creation*. Balinas's own description of his discovery of the Emerald Tablet is reprinted from that book in Antoine Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Phanes Press, 1995). As Balinas's reputation grew, he became known as Apollonius of Tyana, after the Greek sun god Apollo. My interpretation of the life of Apollonius is based on those works and a variety of other sources, including Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*; G. R. S. Mead, *Apollonius of Tyana*; Daniel M. Tredwell, *Apollonius of Tyana*; Osmond de Beauvoir Priaulx, *The Indian Travels of Apollonius of Tyana*; Ralph Shirley, *Occultists and Mystics of All Ages*; and Reginald Merton, *Magicians, Seers, and Mystics*. Though many of these titles are out of print, reprints are available through Kessinger Publishing, Kila, Montana.

2 From the *Letters of Apollonius of Tyana* as reprinted in G. R. S. Mead, *Apollonius of Tyana*. The quotations from Apollonius (Balinas) in this chapter are taken from his letters, from notes taken by his disciple Darius, and from other original material attributed to Philostratus and dated around 220 C.E.



Chapter 2 OUR DIVINE LEGACY

Alexander's Treasure

Three hundred years before Balinas set hands on the Emerald Tablet, Alexander the Great discovered the original tomb of Hermes. According to legend, the momentous event took place after the Macedonian king had conquered Syria and entered Egypt in 332 B.C.E. Alexander's new position as pharaoh gave him access to all the treasures of Egypt, including the revered Hermes' tomb. Convinced it was his destiny to reveal the secrets of Hermes, Alexander headed west across the Libyan desert to where the tomb was located. Before entering Hermes' crypt, however, Alexander consulted the famous Oracle of Siwa to make sure the gods favored his decision. So far, it had seemed, the gods were behind the conquering hero. The dangerous trip through the scorching desert was alleviated by a cool north wind that brought abundant rain, and several large black birds and two hissing snakes are said to have guided the caravan to the oasis at Siwa.

Built in 570 B.C.E., the Egyptian temple at Siwa was dedicated to the supreme god Amen, "the Hidden One," whose sacred name is the origin of our own prayer-ending "amen." The Greeks identified Amen with Zeus, and two previous oracles had pronounced Alexander the son of Zeus. After the Oracle of Siwa also declared him Zeus's son, Alexander felt he possessed the vested power to disseminate the teachings of Hermes. The tomb was located just east of Siwa and contained much treasure besides the golden throne holding the avatar's mummified corpse. There were jeweled statues of the Egyptian gods and stacks of scrolls written in the hand of Hermes. Nothing in the tomb, however, rivaled the splendor of the Emerald Tablet.¹

Alexander's caravan hauled the contents of Hermes' tomb to Memphis and then north to Heliopolis, where the new pharaoh placed the scrolls in the sacred archives and put the Emerald Tablet on public display. The tablet was

written in an ancient Phoenician alphabet, and Alexander assembled a panel of priests and scholars to prepare a Greek translation. The enigmatic message and mysterious physical appearance of the Emerald Tablet caused quite a stir. One traveler, who had seen it on display at Heliopolis, wrote: “It is a precious stone, like an emerald, whereon these characters are represented in bas-relief, not engraved. It is esteemed above 2,000 years old. The matter of this emerald had once been in a fluid state like melted glass, and had been cast in a mold, and to this flux the artist had given the hardness of the natural and genuine emerald, by his art.”²

Construction of the city of Alexandria to house and study the Hermetic texts was begun immediately. One of the scholars who moved to the new city to work on translating the scrolls was a scribe from the Temple of Heliopolis known as Manetho, whose name means “Gift of Thoth.” It is thought that while translating the documents, Manetho uncovered secret directions to the location of the 9,000-year-old writings of the “first Hermes,” whom the Egyptians called Thoth. Manetho recorded that he found the ancient scrolls in two magnificent pillars, one located at Heliopolis and the other in Thebes. Egyptian holy books refer to these sacred pillars as the “Pillars of the Gods of the Dawning Light,” and they were moved to a third temple where they later became known as the two “Pillars of Hermes.” These splendorous columns are mentioned by numerous credible sources down through history. The famous Greek legislator Solon saw them and noted that they memorialized the destruction of Atlantis. The pillars were most likely what the historian Herodotus described in the temple of an unidentified Egyptian god he visited in Phoenicia. “One pillar was of pure gold,” he wrote, “and the other was as of emerald, which glowed at night with great brilliancy.”³

Unfortunately, only a few of Manetho’s works survived the burning of the great library at Alexandria in the early fifth century. These include some of his letters to Ptolemy II, in which he alludes to sacred scrolls written by yet a “second Hermes,” and his book *Sothis*, which describes the Great Flood and the manuscripts of the first two incarnations of Hermes. “After the Flood,” wrote Manetho, “the hieroglyphic texts written by Thoth were translated from the sacred language into Greek and deposited in books in the sanctuaries of Egyptian temples by the second Hermes.” Manetho’s most important work, the *Book of Thoth*, has yet to be found. That book was said

to consist entirely of strange symbols which stimulated the reader's consciousness in such a way that he or she could enter the "presence of the gods" and directly experience the higher reality promised by Hermes. Legend says the book was kept in a locked gold box in the inner sanctuary of the Temple at Hermopolis, where one priest at a time was entrusted with the key. In that way, the sacred knowledge passed down from priest to priest and was not generally disseminated among the people. With the decay of Egyptian civilization, so the story goes, an occult brotherhood was formed to gradually reveal the Hermetic Mysteries to the world. Today, many of Thoth's emblems can be seen on tarot cards, and the principles of his Emerald Tablet are prominent in myths, folktales, and other literature that was passed down to the people.⁴

As for what became of the Emerald Tablet itself, we can only speculate. After Alexander discovered the tablet in the tomb of Hermes in Siwa in early 331 B.C.E., it was copied by Egyptian scribes and displayed publicly in Heliopolis. When Alexander left Egypt later that year and headed north into Cappadocia and Mesopotamia, it seems likely that he took the treasures of Hermes' tomb (including the original tablet) with him. However, it was obvious to everyone around him that whatever happened to Alexander at Siwa had greatly changed him. He started seeing himself as a god and wanted to be treated that way by his generals, but two attempted coups by his officers in 330 B.C.E. persuaded him to concentrate on his military goals. As part of that decision, it is possible Alexander had the sacred items from the tomb stored in the giant underground cavern in Cappadocia, near where the community of Tyana later grew up. Afterwards, Alexander moved eastward at high speed, and by 327 B.C.E., the newly inspired king had conquered all the territory from Babylon to India. But he never returned to reclaim his hidden cache of Egyptian relics. Returning through Babylon towards Cappadocia in 323 B.C.E., he died of a "fever" and was buried somewhere in Egypt. Balinas rediscovered Alexander's hiding place on the outskirts of Tyana in 32 C.E. Around 70 C.E., the city of Alexandria became Balinas's center of operations, and he is said to have written most of his books there. It seems likely that Balinas brought the tablet with him to Alexandria at that time. After his death in 98 C.E., the tablet was entrusted to the Alexandrian librarians. It probably remained in their protection until around 400 C.E.,

when it was reportedly hidden somewhere on the Giza Plateau to protect it from Christian mobs, who eventually destroyed the great libraries at Alexandria that included Balinas' original writings.

In any case, the Emerald Tablet continued to be a primary document at Alexandria after Alexander departed Egypt, and scholars reportedly issued three revised Greek translations of the copies. The first revision, around 290 B.C.E., resulted from a merging of Egyptian, Greek, and Jewish ideas concerning the elements of nature described in the tablet. The second, around 270 B.C.E., reflected Jewish and empiricists' views of the role of fire in alchemy. The last revision, sometime in the last fifty years before the birth of Christ, emphasized the metaphysical methods of transformation revealed in the tablet. Finally, around 300 C.E., the tablet became the center of various new Neoplatonic interpretations that attempted to combine Greek philosophy and Arab mysticism with the moral doctrines of Judaism. Translated copies of the Emerald Tablet made their way into Arabia sometime after 600 C.E., and from there eventually reached Spain and Europe.⁵

Alexander's daring trip to Siwa changed not only his own life but the course of world history as well. With the establishment of Alexandria, civilization entered a new era of enlightenment in which Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and Jewish scholars openly exchanged information and philosophies. By the time the libraries of Alexandria were destroyed in successive burnings by the Romans, Christians, and Arabs, they contained over 700,000 scrolls from around the world. Since Alexandria was a center of world commerce, these new ideas, including the teachings of the Emerald Tablet, spread throughout Europe, Africa, and the Orient.

As we have noted, his visit to Siwa caused equally profound changes in Alexander himself. The world conqueror had always been torn by questions of whether he was a man or a god. Not only had the Oracle of Siwa confirmed his descent from the gods, but the Emerald Tablet showed him how to use his innate powers to become godlike. What he did not see was how his own ego would contaminate those divine powers. He appeared detached and unconcerned with courtly affairs and even started making prophecies. He had a new coin minted and circulated throughout his vast empire that showed his profile wearing the lion-skin headgear of Heracles (the Roman Hercules). Heracles was the son of Zeus and a mortal who

became a god, and obviously Alexander wanted to emphasize the similarity between them. Later, Alexander had another coin minted that portrayed the ram horns of Amen protruding from his head. In an even more dramatic departure from tradition, he ordered that everyone who entered his court prostrate themselves before him—an act he knew Greeks considered a sign of worship. Alexander's growing megalomania led to attempted coups by his officers that resulted in the execution of the leaders.

In the final analysis, Alexander did get his wish to be worshipped as a god. After he died at the age of only thirty-two, divine cults in his honor flourished throughout the Mediterranean states. Shrines and memorials were built depicting him as a god with the ram horns of Amen, just as he had hoped he would be remembered. Unfortunately, for Alexander at least, the Dionysian cults that grew up around his memory were short-lived. While the egotistical ruler had encouraged the formation of cults in his honor while he was still alive, he probably had the foresight to realize that a new religion in his name would not last. That did not stop him from pursuing his own divinity, though. After he died in Babylon, his body was first moved to Aegae in Syria, and then not to his homeland but to Egypt, land of the immortals. His corpse was interred in a crypt in Memphis and then taken to yet another in Alexandria, and from there, he was secretly entombed somewhere in the desert. Perhaps it was Alexander's final wish that he be buried near the oasis of Siwa in the former tomb of Hermes, though to this day, no one knows the exact location of the great conqueror's final resting place.

Thoth: The First Hermes

Alexander's compelling desire to become a god motivated his search for the tomb of Hermes, whom the Greeks considered the messenger of the gods. Yet the Greeks were not the first to claim Hermes by any means. The Egyptians believed he was the son of the Agathodaimon, the great Thoth—the first scribe and god of all learning and hidden knowledge.

Thoth is impossible to categorize because he transcends anything we

normally think about gods and men. At first glance, he seems a simple personification of the powers of logic, for he was said to be responsible for teaching men how to interpret things, arrange their speech in logical patterns, and write down their thoughts. As the inventor of hieroglyphics, Thoth instituted record keeping and founded the sciences of mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. However, there are clues in the many alternative names for this God of Thought from ancient Egyptian papyri that suggest he really represents the ultimate archetype of the Word of God creating the universe. Thoth is the “Source of the Word,” the one god without parents who precedes all others. He is the “Soul of Becoming” whose creative will power fashions reality. “What emanates from the opening of his mouth,” says an ancient Egyptian text, “that comes to pass; he speaks and it is his command.”

As the “Reckoner of the Universe,” Thoth is the source of all natural law; as the “Shepherd of Men” and “Vehicle of Knowledge,” he is the higher mind in man that provides inspiration and inner knowledge. According to the Ebers Papyrus, a 68-foot-long scroll on alchemy that has been called the oldest book in the world: “Man’s guide is Thoth, who bestows on him the gifts of his speech, who makes the books and illumines those who are learned therein, and the physicians who follow him, that they may work cures.” As the “Revealer of the Hidden” and “Lord of Rebirth,” Thoth is the guide to alternate states of consciousness and initiator of human enlightenment. One of Thoth’s scrolls, *The Book of Breathings*, taught humans how to become gods. Usually depicted as a man with the head of an ibis (a wading bird with a long curved beak), Thoth embodies the rational powers of the Sun as well as the intuitive, irrational energies of the Moon. The ibis is the Egyptian symbol for the heart, and, as the “Recorder and Balancer,” Thoth presides over the “Weighing of the Heart” ceremony, which determines who is admitted into heaven. Thoth is the final judge, who weighs individuals’ “true words,” the innermost intent in all of our thoughts and actions.



Thoth carries an early form of the caduceus and holds up the ankh, symbol of the life force. (Illustration by John Stevens based on a mural in the Temple of Seti I, Egypt, 1300 B.C.E.)

It has been written that just before the Great Flood, Thoth preserved the ancient wisdom by inscribing two great pillars and hiding sacred objects and scrolls inside them. According to the ancient historian Herodotus, the magnificent pillars were “hidden under the heavenly vault which could only be found by the worthy, who would use such knowledge for the benefit of mankind.” As we have seen, those two pillars were later rediscovered by Manetho, the Alexandrian scribe, and put on display in a special temple. Egyptian records state that Thoth had authored 36,525 manuscripts, though that is probably just another way of stating their belief that he wrote down the sum of all knowledge: The figure 36,525 is the exact number of days in one

hundred years, which signified perfection or completion to the Egyptians. In summarizing all the ancient wisdom, Thoth became known as the true author of the Emerald Tablet. As a god, Thoth is the archetypal Hermes, the Hermes above, and—according to tradition—the first of three incarnations of Hermes through history.

Jewish mystics identify Thoth with Seth, who was the second son of Adam. They credit Seth with writing the Emerald Tablet, which was taken aboard the ark by Noah. Another version says that Noah found the tablet at the foot of Mount Ararat, and the Torah does mention seven universal laws given to Noah for the benefit of all mankind, not just the Jews. After the Great Flood, Noah supposedly hid the tablet in a cave near Hebron, where it was later discovered by Sarah, wife of Abraham.

On the other hand, the Islamic tradition equates the antediluvian Thoth with Idris, the wise man mentioned in the Koran whom God “exalted to a lofty station” and took bodily into heaven. Idris lived sometime between the eras of Adam and Noah and wrote books that revealed the divine laws to men. But some evidence from Arabia indicates Idris was really Enoch of the Jewish Old Testament. According to the ancient Arabian book *Khitat*: “Thoth is he whom the Hebrews call Enoch. Blessed be his soul—and that is Idris.”

Enoch, whose name means “the initiated,” is portrayed in Genesis as an angelic being who could travel in all realms, just like all the descriptions that have come down to us of Thoth or Hermes. The seventh patriarch of creation and father of Methuselah, Enoch never died but was “translated” into heaven. The apocryphal *Book of Enoch* describes his travels to different worlds and conversations with heavenly beings, as well as his prophecies about the end of the world, in which mankind must pay for profaning the wisdom handed down from heaven. In the Hebrew mystical tradition, Enoch is “Little Yahweh,” the angel closest to God himself, and Jewish Cabalists identify Enoch with the Metatron, the ruler of metals and the Hermetic intermediary between heaven and earth who revealed the Holy Cabala. That mystical system presents a religious philosophy of divine evocation based on the occult meanings of words in the scriptures. One of the most famous books of the Cabala, the *Sepher Yezirah*, describes a cosmology identical to that of the Emerald Tablet in which all of creation emanates from the thoughts of the One Mind. The Tablets of Enoch, containing magical symbols, are part of the initiatory scheme of the Order of the Golden Dawn, and yet another popular

occult system, known as Enochian Magic, uses the language of the Enochian angels that was dictated to mathematician John Dee in 1584 through his medium and practicing alchemist Edward Kelly (see chapter 14). Supposedly Dee used the information to control the tutelary spirits of various nations according to the wishes of Queen Elizabeth, in a kind of sixteenth-century psychic warfare project.⁶

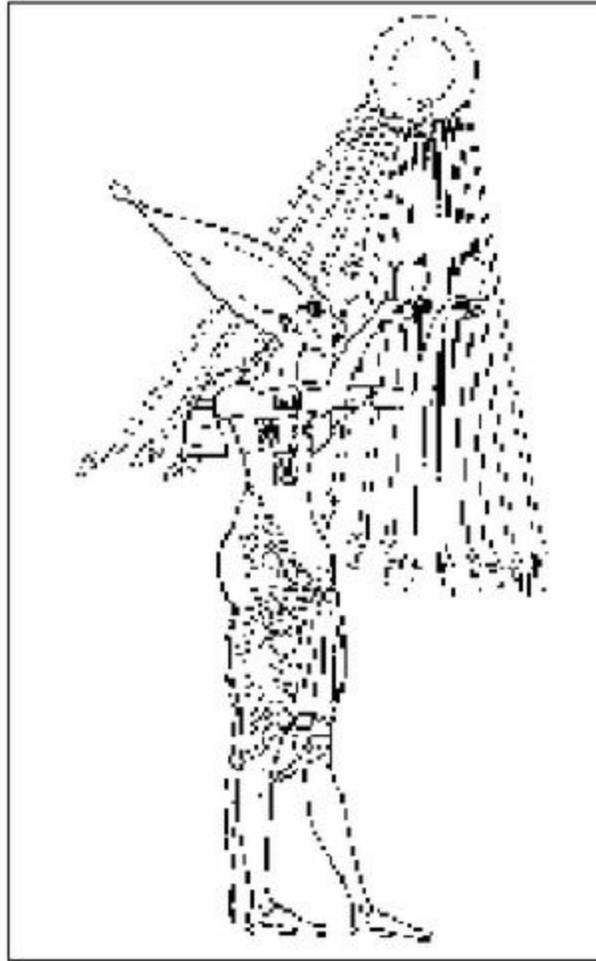
Akhenaten: The Second Hermes

The “second Hermes” arrives on the scene sometime after the Great Flood. Following a strict genealogy, most Egyptologists identify the second Hermes as the son of Thoth and father of Tat. At least one legend, however, describes the second Hermes as an ancient philosopher who discovered the Emerald Tablet in a cave while traveling in Ceylon. After studying the tablet, he learned how to travel both in heaven and earth and harness the forces of the Above and the Below. He traveled throughout Asia and the Middle East teaching and healing, much like Balinas did centuries later. According to the Ebers Papyrus, such a person actually lived around 1550 B.C.E.⁷

More esoteric authors associate the second Hermes with an Egyptian pharaoh by the name of Akhenaten, who ruled from 1364 to 1347 B.C.E. Some have dubbed Akhenaten the “Extraterrestrial King,” and there is no doubt he possessed alienlike features. He had a thin face and a massive, elongated bald head supported by a spindly neck, and his drooping shoulders, pear-shaped torso, lack of musculature, and scrawny legs certainly made him look weak and out of place in this world. The ascetic Akhenaten was very androgynous in appearance, and respected scholars have even accused him of being a homosexual or a woman masquerading as a man. Statues of Akhenaten have survived that show him naked with no male genitalia and the breasts of a woman. It is known that this freakish pharaoh claimed one of the most beautiful women in the world as his bride—the lovely Queen Nefertiti, whose family origins are still unknown to Egyptologists—and also shared the throne with a handsome young man by the name of Smenkhkare. Both of Akhenaten’s corulers shared the title “Beauty of All Beauties.”⁸

Akhenaten was born Amenhotep IV (meaning “Amen is Satisfied”) but changed his name to Akhenaten (“He Who Serves the Aten”) when he broke with the priests of Amen and set up a new monotheistic religion which recognized the visible sun as the One Thing, the source of all creative energy. The new Egyptian god, called the Aten, or simply “the Disk,” was never personified like previous gods but was thought of as an abstract force. Pictures of the Aten show the solar Disk with rays coming down from heaven and terminating on Earth in dozens of tiny hands—a marvelous symbol of the One Thing.

“The Aten is Radiant Energy personified,” wrote one twentieth-century Egyptologist, “that is to say, an all-pervading reality of an *immanent* character. Akhenaten deliberately brushed aside the distinction between the god, maker of the solar Disk, and the solar Disk itself, the distinction between creative *energy* and created *matter*. The Disk was, like all matter that falls under our senses, but a visible manifestation of something more subtle, invisible, intangible, everlasting—its essence. And the heat and light, the energy of the Sun, was the manifestation of that One Thing of which the visible flaming Disk was yet another manifestation.”⁹



Akhenaten pays homage to the Aten. (Illustration by John Stevens based on a Cairo National Museum stele from 1380 B.C.E.)

Although history makes no mention of it, some writers have speculated that Akhenaten rediscovered the Emerald Tablet at the beginning of his rule as pharaoh. According to at least one ancient papyrus, without the wisdom of Thoth, the pyramid of Cheops could not be built, so a great search throughout Egypt was conducted until the tablet was found.

Whether or not Akhenaten beheld the actual tablet, he stands as a candidate for the second Hermes because he tried to apply the tablet's principles throughout his reign. Known as the heretic pharaoh, he espoused the revolutionary concept of “living in truth” and acting in natural accord with cosmic principles. He referred to this universal ideal as *Maat*, which meant the “real thing” or absolute truth—the original will of the One God as

expressed by his One Mind. The agent of *Maat* was the One Thing, of which the physical sun, or the solar Disk, was the material expression.

Some researchers believe that Akhenaten went so far as to append a phrase summarizing his view of the Aten to the original tablet. The additional rubric refers to how perfectly the Emerald Tablet explains the “Operation of the Sun,” and several scholars have noted that in the history of the world, only with Akhenaten did the impersonal “Operation of the Sun” take on such profound religious and cultural significance. In fact, a few translators of the tablet deliberately omitted this last rubric because they felt it did not fit the tablet’s style and was added sometime after the original document was composed.

No one denies that Akhenaten was a gifted writer. His *Hymn to the Aten* is considered one of the best pieces of Egyptian lyric poetry ever discovered. Numerous scholars have noted its similarity in spirit to the Emerald Tablet, as well as to Psalm 104 of the Bible. A few of Akhenaten’s lines reveal his passionate monotheism: “How manifold it is, what You have made yet hidden from the face of man. Oh One God, like whom there is no other, You created the world according to your desire, while You were alone: all men, cattle, and wild beasts, whatever is on earth, going on its feet, and what is on high, flying with its wings.”

The principle of “living in truth” permeated every level of Egyptian society under Akhenaten. Most noticeable was the sudden change in the stiff and lifeless style that dominated Egyptian art for centuries. For the first time, Egyptian reliefs and paintings portrayed natural subjects such as plants and animals in exacting, true-life detail, and traditional scenes of sterile Egyptian society were replaced by portraits of such ungodly behavior as Akhenaten kissing his wife or bouncing his daughters on his knee. In another striking break with tradition, Akhenaten ordered the abandonment of the old capitol of Thebes and built a new capital city, Akhetaten (“Horizon of the Aten”), on a desolate stretch of land along the east bank of the Nile. Scandalously, villas in the city of 60,000 were constructed without separate quarters for men and women, and women in particular were treated with more respect there. Akhenaten’s court was one of the most open ever. His advisors were of many different nationalities, including Canaanites, Myceanans, and Philistines.

Yet for the disenfranchised patriarchal priests, Akhenaten might as well have been from another planet. After just seventeen years of rule, Akhenaten

and Nefertiti disappeared under mysterious circumstances, and it seems likely that the former priests of Amen did away with them. Akhenaten was well aware of the brewing unrest among the priests and might have taken the precaution of hiding the Emerald Tablet or passing it on to an enlightened individual outside the Egyptian court. Some scholars have suggested that confidant was a man of God by the name of Moses. According to Exodus, Moses fled to the land of the Kenites, which is what the subjects of Akhenaten were called. In the open court of the time, it can be assumed that Moses would have conferred with the pharaoh many times on behalf of his people. In *Moses and Monotheism* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1939), Sigmund Freud suggested that Moses, as a contemporary of Akhenaten, somehow appropriated the pharaoh's idea of one supreme god and brought the new religion to the Jews. Similar sentiments were expressed by renowned Egyptologist Jan Assman in *Moses the Egyptian* (Harvard University Press, 1997). Perhaps the link between the tablet and Christianity is more direct than anyone could have possibly guessed, for there is an old legend that says the second Hermes gave the Emerald Tablet to Miriam, sister of Moses, and she placed it in the Ark of the Covenant for safekeeping.

In any case, the heretic pharaoh was eventually replaced by a ten-year-old boy, probably Akhenaten's son-in-law, whose name Tutankaten ("Servant of the Aten") was changed to Tutankamen ("Servant of Amen") after Akhenaten's murder. The child-pharaoh's actions were tightly controlled by the fundamentalist priests, who restored the capital to Thebes, destroyed the city of Akhetaten, and erased all traces of the new religion. Unlike the magnificent golden mummy of King Tut, the bodies of Akhenaten and Nefertiti were never found. Archeologist Sir Alan Gardner surmised that Akhenaten's body had been "torn to pieces and thrown to the dogs." The only written references to the Aten after the death of Akhentaten were enigmatic allusions that associated the solar Disk with the great Sphinx on the Giza Plain.¹⁰

Balinas: The Third Hermes

The third Hermes—the Thrice-Greatest Hermes referred to in the Emerald Tablet as we know it—came with the second millennium. He is none other than our own Balinas, Apollonius of Tyana. Balinas discovered the tablet in a cave, where it might have been hidden by Alexander the Great on his way to Mesopotamia. In any case, it was Balinas who absorbed the tablet’s teachings and once again brought them to the light of human consciousness.¹¹



Apollonius of Tyana portrayed as Hermes Trismegistus. (Diodorus Siculus, Historia Deorum Fatidicorum , Paris 1513)

The earliest known written translation of the Emerald Tablet is as an appendix to an Arabic book known as the *Book of Balinas the Wise on Causes*, written around 650 C.E. and probably based on Balinas’s Alexandrian writings. Another Arabic text, written by alchemist Jabir Hayyan around 800 C.E., contains a copy of the Emerald Tablet and also gives Balinas as the source. In all these texts, Balinas describes finding the tablet in

the tomb of Hermes. Balinas spent many years as a teacher and writer in Alexandria, and it is from that city that his books about the tablet made their way into Arabia.

While it is extremely difficult at this late date to name the single, true author of the Emerald Tablet, an even more basic question remains: Was its author a man or a god? The answer down through the ages has always been *both*, and, whether portrayed as man or god, Hermes is always the revealer of celestial knowledge hidden to mankind and is the ultimate spiritual guide, ready to trick us into following his lead. In many ways, Hermes is like a spirit that reincarnates itself through time to guide us in our struggle toward enlightenment, showing up in every generation whether we like it or not. That must have been what Henry Wadsworth Longfellow had in mind when he wrote the poem *Hermes Trismegistus* in 1882. The celebrated poet finished the lyrical ode just a few weeks before he died.

*Was he one or many, merging
Name and fame in one,
Like a stream, to which, converging,
Many streamlets run?
Who shall call his dreams fallacious?
Who has searched or sought
All the unexplored and spacious
Universe of thought?
Who in his own skill confiding,
Shall with rule and line
Mark the border-land dividing
Human and divine?
Trismegistus! Three times greatest!
How thy name sublime
Has descended to this latest
Progeny of time!*

History of the Tablet

Like the exalted life of Hermes Trismegistus, the history of the Emerald Tablet is clouded in myths and legends. Several contemporary authors have even suggested that the tablet was a gift from extraterrestrials or originated in the lost civilization of Atlantis. A few have postulated that Thoth, either as alien or Atlantean, wrote the tablet 36,000 years ago and was incarnated several times over the centuries to propagate its principles. According to other sources, the tablet was created in Egypt about 10,000 years ago, though some historians point to a date around 3000 B.C.E., when the Phoenicians settled on the Syrian coast. Egyptian papyri dating as far back as 2000 B.C.E. contain many of the same phrases and principles stated in the Emerald Tablet, including references to the One Mind, the One Thing, and the correspondences between the Above and the Below. One papyrus known as “An Invocation to Hermes,” which dates from Hellenistic Egypt, actually mentions the tablet: “I know your *names* in the Egyptian tongue, and your *true name* as it is written on the Holy Tablet in the holy place at Hermopolis, where you did have your birth.”¹²

Wherever it came from, the Emerald Tablet contains an extremely succinct summary of the Hermetic tradition, undoubtedly the oldest spiritual tradition in the West. The generic quality of its concepts allowed the tablet to permeate the foundations of human civilization, and, while no direct evidence links the tablet to Eastern religions, it shares uncanny similarities in concepts and terminology with Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. In the West, the Emerald Tablet found a home not only in the pagan tradition but in all three of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Many of the tenets of the Gnostics, an influential religious sect of late antiquity, seem taken directly from the Emerald Tablet. The Gnostics focused not on faith and contrition but on the attainment of direct knowledge of reality through private psychological and meditative exercises. They sought purification of their own personalities so they might develop “gnosis,” or direct knowledge of ultimate truth, and they held that light and darkness, and good and evil, are equally eternal and both part of the wonder of creation. “All Is One” was their creed.

More modern spiritual movements, such as Freemasonry, the Rosicrucians, Theosophy, the Golden Dawn, Eckankar, Fourth Way, and many New Age philosophies, are also based on ideas first revealed in the

Emerald Tablet. The reverence with which these diverse groups hold the tablet is exemplified in the following paragraph from Freemasonry's *Morals and Dogma*: "He who desires to attain the understanding of the Grand Word and the possession of the Great Secret, ought carefully to read the Hermetic philosophers, and will undoubtedly attain initiation, as others have done; but he must take, for the key of their allegories, the single dogma of Hermes, contained in his Table of Emerald."¹³

In the so-called Hermetic Arts, the tablet is the basis of magical invocation and the doctrine of sympathetic magic, in which the powers from the Above are drawn down to earth and fixed in talismans or statues. It is also the source of images seen on tarot cards and other divinatory tools. Those same images show up in the dreams and imagination of people undergoing psychological transformation, and the tablet has become an important reference tool in the fields of analytical and transpersonal psychology.

Without doubt, the Emerald Tablet was the inspiration behind alchemy for centuries. Many medieval alchemists hung a copy of the tablet on the wall of their laboratories and constantly referred to the "secret formula" it contained. The alchemists really believed that the Emerald Tablet revealed truths too powerful for most people to handle and invented secret alphabets and coded phrases in which to discuss their progress so the uninitiated would not comprehend the true spiritual nature of their quest. While the alchemists' spiritual contribution is just being rediscovered, historians of science have long conceded that alchemy's experimental approach gave rise to the modern disciplines of chemistry and physics. However, the legacy of the Emerald Tablet is much more than just subtle influences on the development of our religious and scientific philosophies. It is a living document that speaks to each of us directly about our personal transformation. Indeed, the Emerald Tablet speaks to the whole world. "It is the cryptic epitome of the alchemical opus," says Jungian analyst Dr. Edward Edinger—"a recipe for the second creation of the world." Ethnobotanist and psychedelic guru Terence McKenna says that the tablet of Hermes presents "a formula for a holographic matrix" that is mirrored in the human mind.

"Whatever one chooses to believe about it," summed up John and Caitlin Matthews in *The Western Way* (Penguin Arkana 1995), "there is no getting away from the fact that the Emerald Tablet is one of the most profound and

important documents to have come down to us. It has been said more than once that it contains the sum of all knowledge—for those able to understand it.” So, while its roots may be lost in history, the words of the Emerald Tablet have survived, so that each of us alive today has a chance at true spiritual breakthrough denied to generations of previous seekers. Whether Alexander the Great passed it down to us or it was created by some ancient ghostwriter, we do have the Arabic and Latin translations of the original document with which to work.

The Corpus Hermeticum

The spirit of Hermes lives on, not only in the Emerald Tablet, but also in seventeen documents containing teachings ascribed to him and known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*. These treatises expand on the principles of the Emerald Tablet and appear to be records of intimate conversations between Hermes and his disciples. For over three centuries, these writings were thought by the church to be very ancient and were held in the highest esteem. The church fathers believed they lent support to Christian doctrines, and it was even suggested that the writings of Hermes replace those of Aristotle in the schools. So it caused a great scandal when fundamentalist scholars in the seventeenth century declared these documents forgeries written by “semi-Christians.”

How did the Hermetic literature, which had been embraced by the early followers of Christ, come to be condemned by Renaissance Christians? One possible explanation was given by G. R. S. Mead in his definitive book *Thrice Greatest Hermes* (Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 1906): “The Church Fathers appealed to the authority of antiquity and to a tradition that had never been called in question, in order to show that they taught nothing fundamentally new—that, in brief, they taught on main points what Hermes had taught. They lived in days too proximate to that tradition to have ventured on bringing charges of plagiarism and forgery against it without exposing themselves to a crushing rejoinder from men who were still the hearers of its living voice and possessors of its written word.”

While Hermes is never mentioned in the Bible, his counterpart, Enoch, is mentioned several times. In fact, none of the Christian scholars of the seventeenth century would have denied that Enoch was a real person who achieved union with God. That Enoch and Hermes might be the same person was never considered, though the idea was accepted by Islamic scholars.

“In the mystic sense,” summarized the nineteenth-century French theorist Antonin Artaud, “Thoth or the Egyptian Hermes was the symbol of the Divine Mind; he was incarnated Thought, the Living Word—the Logos of Plato and the Word of the Christians. So the *Corpus Hermeticum* really contains the ancient Egyptian doctrine of which traces can be discovered from the hieroglyphics which still cover the monuments of Egypt.”¹⁴

Actually, whether or not the *Corpus Hermeticum* was written by the hand of Hermes is a moot point, since the Emerald Tablet actually encourages this sort of plagiarism by espousing the idea of the One Mind, which anyone can access through proper mental attitude. This One Mind is the mind of Hermes, the mind of our higher selves, and anyone who reaches it can write from the perspective of Hermes Trismegistus. It is a tradition that goes all the way back to Thoth, who was said to inspire people with direct perception of truth. “May Thoth write to you daily,” utters the 3,500-year-old Papyrus of Ani.

As we approach the third millennium, Thoth’s insights are being realized by more people than ever before. The modern *Corpus Hermeticum* includes spiritual fiction, guides to personal transformation, channeled works, and even messages brought back by those experiencing near-death visions. Additionally, many people have created a personal *Corpus Hermeticum* in private journals or diaries in which they record thoughts that seem to come from a higher source. In today’s world, the guidance of Hermes is being sought by more people every day. In fact, in the following chapter, we too will attempt to directly contact the eternal Hermes.¹⁵

¹ Alexander’s discovery of the Emerald Tablet was related by Albertus Magnus in *Liber de Secretis Chymicus* and *De Mineralibus*. The same story was told in a book published in 1496 by Jerome Torella.

² From Dr. Sigismund Bacstrom, *Original Alchemical Manuscripts* and reprinted in Manly P. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages* (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1977). It should be noted that the ancients used the term “emerald” to refer not only to emeralds but also to green crystal

and jasper.

3 In *Iamblichus: On the Mysteries*, Thomas Taylor reports that Ammianus Marcellinus stated that the Pillars of Hermes dated to before the Great Flood and were found in caverns not far from Thebes. The mysterious pillars are also described by Achilles Tatius in *On Aratus*, Dio Chrysostom in *Oratio 49*, and Laertius in *Life of Democritus*.

4 References to alchemical processes are obvious in the works of Goethe, Chaucer, Dante, Shakespeare, Hawthorne, and dozens of other famous authors. See Donald Maclean and Adam McLean, *Goethe's Fairy Tale of the Green Snake* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Phanes Press, 1993); William Gorski, *Yeats and Alchemy* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995); Wolfgang Rudat, *Alchemy in The Sun Also Rises: Hidden Gold in Hemingway's Narrative* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992); Noel Cobb, *Prospero's Island* (London: Coventure, 1984); Betinna Knapp, *Theatre and Alchemy* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1980); and Charles Nicholl, *The Chemical Theatre* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

5 The chronology of the Alexandrian translations of the Emerald Tablet is from Gottlieb Latz, *Die Alchemie*, translated by Dennis William Hauck in *Secret of the Emerald Tablet* (Edmunds, Washington: Holmes Group, 1993).

6 The Koran refers to the sage Idris as the “nabi.” Enoch is described in Genesis 5:18-24 and Hebrews 11:5. The apocalyptic *Book of Enoch* is thought to have been written between 300 B.C.E. and 300 C.E., but the original book was destroyed by Christians at the end of the fourth century. After a copy was discovered in Ethiopia in 1773, a sort of *Corpus Enochum* developed that envelopes original texts, including Meric Causabon's *A True and Faithful Relation of What Passed for Many Years Between Dr. John Dee and Some Spirits* (Glasgow: Antonine Publishing, 1659, 1972) and a number of channeled titles, such as the Bible-like *Keys of Enoch* by J. J. Hurtak (Los Gatos, California: Academy for Future Science, 1977) and Elizabeth Claire Prophet, *The Forbidden Mysteries of Enoch* (Livingston, Montana: Summit Lighthouse, 1989).

7 The story of Hermes' discovery of the tablet in Ceylon was first related around 1150 C.E. by the Arabian writer Ibn Arfa Ras. As for Hermes' Asian presence, the Hindu religious text *Mahanirvanatantra* states that Hermes was the same as Buddha, and each was known as the “Son of the Moon.”

[8](#) Akhenaten is described by Joy Collier, *The Heretic Pharaoh* (New York: Dorset Press, 1970); Donald Redford, *Akhenaten: The Heretic King* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984); Cyril Aldred, *Akhenaten: Pharaoh of Egypt* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1988); as well as by Daniel Blair Stewart, *Akhunaton: The Extraterrestrial King* (Berkeley, California: Frog Ltd., 1995).

[9](#) From Savitri Devi, *Son of the Sun: The Life and Philosophy of Akhenaten, King of Egypt* (London, England: AMORC Inc., 1996). Sir Flinders Petrie expressed a similar opinion in his *History of Egypt* (London, 1899).

[10](#) The sacred city of Akhetaten was also known as Tell el Armarna, and its ruins are located near the modern city of Asyut in Egypt. The desecrated tomb of Smenkhare, who ruled for a very short time after Akhenaten, was discovered in 1907 in the Valley of Kings near Thebes by an amateur archeologist. Some Egyptologists believe that Smenkhare was the son of Akhenaten, though stelae showing them caressing and inscriptions on the coffin of Smenkhare have led others to believe they had a more intimate relationship. Tutankamen ruled only nine years and died at age eighteen. His golden burial vault was found in the Valley of Kings in 1922 by Howard Carter.

[11](#) Antoine Faivre, G. R. S. Mead, and some other scholars view the progression of the three Hermes according to the strict genealogical tradition. The first Hermes was known as Thoth (Tehuti) or Agathodaimon (the Good Spirit), who communicated in a special sacred language understood only by priests. The second Hermes, who was actually known as Hermes Trismegistus, was the son of Thoth and father of Tat. He used a later, though still archaic, language to communicate. The third Hermes was Tat, who may have been a contemporary of the Alexandrian scribe Manetho. Tat spoke a more modern form of Egyptian, which Manetho translated into Greek.

[12](#) The earliest existing translation of the Emerald Tablet is as an appendix to the Arabic *Kitab Balinas al-Hakim fi'l-Ital* (*Book of Balinas the Wise on Causes*), written between 650 and 800 C.E. It also appeared in a book of advice to kings called the *Kitab Sirr al-Asar*, which probably was written around 800 C.E. Other Arabic texts date the tablet to the alchemist Gebir (Jabir Hayyan, 722-815). The tablet first appeared in Europe in the *Secretum Secretorum* (*Book of the Secrets of Creation*), which was attributed

to Aristotle but was actually a rendering of the *Kitab Sirr al-Asar*, translated in 1140 by Johannes Hispalensis and in 1243 by Philip of Tripoli. Albertus Magnus (1193-1280) also issued several Latin translations of the Arabic versions of the tablet. Phrases from the Emerald Tablet can be found much earlier in the Papyrus of Ani and in other chapters from the Book of the Dead (1500 B.C.E.), the Berlin Papyrus 3024 (2000 B.C.E.), and other scrolls dating between 1000 and 300 B.C.E. Some of these documents mention a canon of Egyptian sacred writing that included the teachings of Hermes and was supposedly still in existence at the time of Clement of Alexandria (around 170 C.E.). The Invocation to Hermes was translated by F. G. Kenyon in *Greek Papyri in the British Museum* (London, 1893).

[13](#) The Masonic reference is from page 777 of Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (Richmond, Virginia: L. H. Jenkins, 1921). Much of the Masonic doctrine contains thinly veiled reference to the Hermetic tradition. For instance, the name Hiram Ibis refers to the first Hermes (Hermes Ibis), who, according to Masonic tradition, arrived “in the year of the world 2670.”

[14](#) From *Le Theatre et son Double* (The Theater and Its Double, Paris, 1938). Artaud was a metaphysician who rejected narrative realism and sought to introduce Hermetic principles into the theater. He was a forerunner of the theatrical “happenings” of the 1960s.

[15](#) The modern *Corpus Hermeticum* consists of hundreds of popular books written in the twentieth century. It includes such titles as Dr. M. Doreal, *The Emerald Tablets of Thoth the Atlantean* (Castle Rock, Colorado: White Temple Publications, 1939); Michael Morgan, *The Emerald Covenant* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Hampton Roads Publishing, 1996); Mark L. Prophet, *Studies in Alchemy: Saint Germain* (Los Angeles: Summit University Press, 1986); Nicki Scully, *The Golden Cauldron* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear & Co., 1991); and Lee Carroll, *Kryon: Alchemy of the Human Spirit* (Del Mar, California: Kryon Writings, 1996).



Chapter 3

A CONVERSATION WITH HERMES

One way to grasp the meaning of the Emerald Tablet is to try to communicate with its author using a psychological method known as active imagination. This is the same method used by those who composed the *Corpus Hermeticum* centuries ago, and their impassioned treatises were also attempts to elaborate on the meaning of the tablet. All we have to do to achieve this state of mind is to imagine what it would be like if we could corner the mercurial Hermes and get him to come back to the modern world to answer a few questions.

Traditionally, rituals to invoke Hermes have involved a journey or vision quest that incorporates all four archetypal elements: Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. Therefore, let us begin our journey just before dawn in a lush forest, full of towering trees and vegetation, where the odor of the earth is strong. There is just enough light for us to make out the footpath before us as we move through the densest part of the forest and suddenly step out onto a rocky beach, where the rolling waves of the ocean drown out all other sounds and a deep-red sun peeks over a watery horizon. We pause a moment to savor the beauty of the dawn and survey our surroundings. We can barely see a zigzagging footpath winding up the sheer cliff to our right. We are at the base of a jagged mountain whose peak is shrouded in clouds.

We embark on the treacherous trail and by midday reach a grassy outcropping halfway up the mountain. A refreshing breeze blows in from the sea, and as we venture to the edge of the cliff, we are greeted by a spectacular view of the ocean and forest below. The combination of sun and wind is invigorating, and we lie down in the grass for a moment to enjoy it. Unfortunately, we cannot linger, since we must reach our destination before dark. As we press on, the path becomes steeper and more difficult, then suddenly widens and turns downward into a small canyon. In the subdued light of the canyon, we spot a flickering orange light coming from a large cave. Oddly, the more we think about our destination, the quicker we are propelled along the path, and we reach the cave in no time at all. In front of the cave, a giant bonfire burns, illuminating the entrance.

Before us are two great wooden doors with crystal doorknobs, and we carefully open the one to our right. The heavy door opens only partially, and after we squeeze through, it slams shut behind us with a thud that echoes through the brilliantly lit inner chamber. As our eyes adjust to the brightness, we notice that everything is pure white. The floors, walls, and ceiling are all uniformly white, and it is impossible to discern any corners or even to determine the shape of the room. The only identifiable object is a massive golden cube at the very center. The metallic monolith towers over us and must be at least twelve feet on each end. As we approach, electricity fills the air and tiny sparks start shooting out from the empty space above the cube. Before our eyes, the sparks coalesce into a hovering box of lightning, a cube of diamond-white light that hangs suspended well above the solid cube on the floor. Between the two, a pinkish vapor forms and then splits like a silken veil to reveal the tall figure of a man.

The man is taller than any mortal and bathed in a shimmering greenish light. As he materializes before us, his body is transparent for a few seconds and his heart and brain can be seen, pulsating and radiant. We watch as his heart transforms into an ibis bird and his brain into a gleaming emerald, but his flesh soon takes form, concealing those inner treasures. Finally, flowing robes of deep blue and yellow envelop him and golden sandals appear on his feet. He is crowned with a purple cloth turban emblazoned with the solar Disk resting in the cradle of the crescent moon. In his left hand he holds a fluttering winged staff entwined with two hissing serpents. The man pushes the intimidating staff toward us, all the while gazing intently into our eyes. His stare is not harsh nor arrogant but full of simple wisdom. He then speaks in a dignified yet benevolent voice:¹ “I am Thrice-Great Hermes, Son of the Divine, the messenger uniting Superiors and Inferiors, and their union is in me as it is in the One Mind.”



Hermes Trismegistus, master of all worlds, holds up the astrolabe, symbol of his connection to the powers of the Above. (Jean-Jacques Boissard, De Divinatione et Magicis Praestigiis, Oppenheim 1616)

Hail Hermes! we reply in unison. Hermes pulls his caduceus wand back to his side and glances down at us. How do we strike up a conversation with this kind of being? Just how openly will this secretive, contradictory man/god answer our questions? We start with something that has mystified philosophers for centuries.

You call yourself Thrice-Great, but what is your real name?

“By Hermes you know me, because that is the one-third I have chosen to show you. But I am truly three times Hermes, an eternal spirit who exists on all three levels of creation. Now am I embodied between the Above and the Below, although I speak not to you but *through* you, for together, we are of One Mind.”

Tell us how we can be of One Mind if you have your thoughts and we have ours? If that were true, we wouldn't need to question you.

“We are all of One Mind, though it has not yet dawned on you, and all questions and all answers are known to the One Mind, thus known to you. Yet your sight is veiled, and you perceive only the shadows and not their source. I speak from the light, as one who has seen, and, though residing in shadow and in light, we are still of One Mind.”

We mean no insult, but why should we believe you? After all, you are known as a notorious trickster.

“To trick those who hide is no deceit. Some of those who are foolish or fearful may even enter into the light and see with their own eyes and verify these truths themselves and finally serve the alchemy of their being. Nor would it be possible to lie when speaking of these highest things, for they are the thoughts of only One Mind.”

You keep mentioning this One Mind. Do you mean God?

“The gods you worship are all part of the One Mind, but because you must name your gods you cannot know God. By naming God, you only create yet another god. Only by being in the ineffable presence of the divine can you know the one God, and for that reason, I do not call God by name but refer only to where God can be found, in the One Mind.”

If God is in the One Mind, which is Above, then the devil must be in the One Thing, which is Below. Aren't the Above and Below simply what we conceive of as heaven and hell?

“Such labels are inventions that serve worldly ends, for the true Above and Below are living things beyond description. In my tablet have I revealed all that can be spoken of these unlimited regions. The Above is the abode of One Mind, and the Below is the abode of One Thing. You need know nothing more because nothing more is knowable; you cannot label the ineffable. Work instead with the tiny spark of consciousness of which you are possessed; that spark can be fanned into a blazing gnosis that burns away the falsity of your tragic self-deception. Thereafter can you verify for yourself that of which I speak. You can behold the One Mind; you can touch the One Thing.”

You mean we can travel in the Above and the Below as you do? How can that be? We are mere mortals!

“Listen carefully. Thought is a bubble of being that erupts on the fabric of reality through the Pattern I revealed in my tablet. Thus are you as mortal as your thoughts, and it is your notion of heaven and hell that keeps you earthbound because it weighs you down with fear and duplicity. The things whereof I speak are everywhere under your nose; you have only to reach out to touch them. But out of your arrogance have you denied the One Mind, and out of your fear have you desecrated the One Thing.”

The Emerald Tablet

In truth, without deceit, certain, and most veritable.

What which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above corresponds to that which is Below, to accomplish the miracles of the One Thing. And just as all things have come from this One Thing, through the meditation of One Mind, so do all created things originate from this One Thing, through Transformation.

Its father is the Sun; its mother the Moon. The Wind carries it in its belly; its nurse is the Earth. It is the origin of All, the consecration of the Universe; its inherent Strength is perfected, if it is turned into Earth.

Separate the Earth from Fire, the Subtle from the Gross, gently and with great Ingenuity. It rises from Earth to heaven and descends again to Earth, thereby combining within Itself the powers of both the Above and the Below.

Thus will you obtain the Glory of the Whole Universe. All Obscurity will be clear to you. This is the greatest Force of all powers, because it overcomes every Subtle thing and penetrates every Solid thing.

In this way was the Universe created. From this comes many wondrous Applications, because this is the Pattern.

Therefore am I called Thrice Greatest Hermes, having all three parts of the wisdom of the Whole Universe. herein have I completely explained the Operation of the Sun.

The Emerald Tablet of Hermes. (Compiled from several early Latin and German versions)

What hope is there for us to change our thoughts and rid ourselves of arrogance if it is the nature of mankind to behave this way and has been for thousands of years?

“The only hope for mankind is the alchemy revealed in my living tablet. But be not mistaken: the alchemy of which I speak is working with your seemingly valueless thoughts and feelings to refine them to operate on all levels with the same force with which they work in the divine Mind. In truth, all you are and all I am is thoughts and feelings, yet all thoughts are from just One Mind; and all feelings are in just One Thing. Therefore, your

consciousness is both a part and the whole. Know that the One Thing within you is your chaotic feelings, the rejected energy that can drive your transformation. Know that the union of thought and feeling is like a stone you can carry anywhere, for this intelligence of the heart is everywhere just One Thing.”

If through alchemy we are able to overcome our ignorance and change our beliefs, then how do we actually travel in these wondrous realms?

“Once your thoughts are purified, the ascent and descent are as natural as breathing, since the Above is subtle, and the Below is gross. The subtlest part of matter is soul; the subtlest part of soul is spirit; and the subtlest part of spirit is God. To travel in these realms, you need only change the density of your thoughts, and by weighing shall you be judged. First you must free yourself from the roots of denial which keep you earthbound, which is the lead of your existence, and invert them into the roots of heaven, planted in the golden light Above. Then, to become subtler, rid yourself of fear and follow your lightest thoughts as they rise. To become denser, seek sensation and expression, and follow your heaviest thoughts as they plummet. But do not linger in heaven, my son. On the earth is where your Work takes place. For in the rarified atmosphere of consciousness, thoughts are actions, and all thoughts are in just One Mind, and all results are in just One Thing.”

Yet we are afraid to leave the earth, to travel through the realms as you. How can we not be afraid?

“Fear is great, for it destroys all subtle things and makes lead of gold. You cannot ascend and still have fear, for fear is darkness and belongs to the heaviest part of unknowing. To rise above fear, you must rise above the part of you that is in the darkness, whatever it may be. Look in the deepest of your wounds, for there lies the gold of your being, and though it pains you, you have to excise this luminous metal from the crevices where it has accumulated. Then release this treasure to the light of consciousness and follow it as it flies upward and merges with the greater Sun, to the place where total knowledge burns forever, where fear cannot follow. There, all things will be clear to you in the eternal moment before you return, for you will behold the Fountain of Fountains and see the One Mind becoming One Thing.”

What is this dark and chaotic One Thing we fear so much that it holds us to Earth?

“You should not fear the One Thing, for you have dominion over it. It is the nothing that is something, the same substance of which your dreams are made. But your fear has turned it into your nightmare, and only through its dissolution can you reclaim your power and dream anew. For just as your dreams are fashioned by your hidden mind, so is the world dreamt by the hidden mind of God. Therefore, the thoughts of the One Mind are your reality, and the presence of the One Thing is your dream. And the dreamer and his dream are always One.”

So which is more important, the One Thing or the One Mind?

“You sorely try my patience. Do you still not see that the One Mind and the One Thing are One? They are different aspects of the same thing, though one is Above and the other Below. Mind and matter appear as two in the mirror of existence, but they flow into one another as One. Like the Fountain of Fountains feeding on itself, so does one continually pass into the other. The One Mind becomes the One Thing, and out of the One Thing comes the One Mind. They are and always were both One.”

It seems like the universe is like a gigantic Lava Lamp, in which the light bulb of the One Mind heats up the gooey One Thing in a display of continuously changing shapes—rising and falling, rising and falling. What’s the point?

“You do not see the point, since you are always forgetting that the universe is not for your entertainment. It does not serve you; you serve it. That is the only point. You are nothing but a vehicle of the miniscule light within you, and that light is part of the agenda but not you. Yet despite your missing the point, I have revealed to you where to look for the One Thing and how to fashion it into anything you desire through the formula of the whole universe. Do not disappoint me, human: you can best serve the universe through the sacrifice of the One Thing in you, to perfect it and offer it up for your glory and the glory of God. For you and God are also and always One.”

Just what is this light that is more important than us?

“You are bound to earth because of the gravity of your soul, so be thankful for your spark of spirit, the consciousness that has enlightened you, else you would be weighed down even further into the darkness of matter. For between the greater light and the greater darkness, you are suspended. Yet if you merge with the pure light within you, you join the whole universe, for the light is freely distributed and penetrates the darkness everywhere. The

light within you is the same light that divides the darkness, for all light is One, just as all darkness is One, and even apart they are still One.”

So this light from One Mind penetrating the darkness of One Thing is the great Pattern you speak of in your tablet?

“There is only one Pattern in the Operation of the Sun. By Fire will you be set free; by Water will you reclaim your power. By Air will you discover your inner worth; by Earth will you realize its potential. In your Dissolution you will see the Pattern encompassing you and know what to do, for this Pattern originated with the birth of the universe and is sealed in time and space everywhere. Only then will you be allowed to contribute to the universe; only then will the child of your imagination be allowed to grow. For the Secret Fire quickens only proper matter, which even then must be repeatedly enthroned and made pure enough to join with the subtlest of the subtle in a lasting Coagulation. In this seven-stepped Pattern have I revealed all, yet all is only One.”

How can there be these seven steps to the Pattern and yet everything be One?

“There are seven steps on the ladder of becoming, and this is the Pattern from which the formula for ascent is derived. But having reached the seventh step, the eighth step is no longer on the ladder, and you stand beyond its Pattern. This is the Eighth Sphere, which is the Cosmic Stone, where light and dark, mind and matter, are eternally One. Only from this point can be seen the greater pattern, which I shall now envision, though thus do I take leave of you, since thought is my chariot. But what I see shall I reveal, which is all the science of the whole universe, for from the Eighth, I see only One.”

Followed by streamers of greenish mist, the great Hermes fades away into nothingness, and we suddenly find ourselves back in the forest again with only the lingering light of his presence to guide us. For each of us, that light is the green beacon of the Emerald Tablet, and in the following six chapters, we shall examine each section of the tablet in turn to discover how to use the insights Hermes has given us to transform the very fabric of our existence.

¹ The description of Hermes is taken from Manly P. Hall, *The Secret Teaching of All Ages* (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1977). The invocation is based on actual rituals described in Chic and Tabatha Cicero, eds., *The Golden Dawn Journal, Book Three: The Art of Hermes* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1995).



Chapter 4 MIRACLES OF THE ONE THING

How to Read the Emerald Tablet

The alchemists believed the Emerald Tablet dated from the dawn of time and contained the divine revelation of the mechanics of creation. The tablet was the single authority that guided their theoretical and experimental work, and its author, Hermes Trismegistus, was regarded as a real person who had achieved union with the One Mind of the whole universe. “Hermes saw the totality of things,” declared the *Corpus Hermeticum*. “Having seen, he understood. Having understood, he had the power to reveal and show. And indeed what he knew, he wrote down. What he wrote, he mostly hid away, keeping silence rather than speaking out, so that every generation coming into the world had to seek out these things.”

That hidden wisdom is what Akhenaten, Alexander, Balinas, and many others have found so profound and enduring about the Emerald Tablet. The thirty-four lines of this supremely objective treatise are dense with meaning, and most readers feel compelled to search for the deeper meaning of its precepts. The tablet is organized into “rubrics,” so named because in the Latin translations, the first letter of each stanza was written in bold red ink. If we divide the lines according to their natural punctuation and paragraphing, we end up with seven rubrics. The Introductory Rubric describes the author’s attitude and sets the way in which the tablet should be approached:¹

In Truth, without deceit, certain and most veritable.

This declaration is a poignant plea not only for absolute truthfulness but also for freedom of consciousness. The tablet carries a message beyond transient notions of heresy and orthodoxy, and the right to experience states of mind outside the ordinary is a prerequisite to using it. Indeed, part of the experience of working with the Emerald Tablet is the exhilaration of becoming mentally fluid enough to grasp the multilayered meaning of its

words, for the truths of the tablet come across on many different levels at once. On the strictly physical level, the Introductory Rubric tells us that the truth expressed here is not fantasy but is real and can be known or verified by experimentation. To paraphrase this rubric in psychological terms, we must become “free of dogma, without ego, centered, and most intuitive.” For most of us this requires a purification, a clearing away of worldly concerns to expose the unadulterated being within. If we open our minds and hearts in this way, this remarkably succinct document will speak volumes to our essence, our real Self.

The Doctrine of Correspondences

The second rubric of the Emerald Tablet is known as the Orientation Rubric, because it positions the reader in relation to the processes described in the tablet:

*That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above,
and that which is Above corresponds to that which is Below,
to accomplish the miracles of the One Thing.
And just as all things have come from this One Thing,
through the meditation of One Mind,
so do all created things originate from this One Thing
through Transformation.*

The relationship described here is vertical, and it locates the reader at the center of a living interaction between the Above and the Below, between heaven and earth. This cosmic axis, the backbone of God, is the divine image imprinted on all of creation. It extends infinitely upward and infinitely downward, and the only thing clearly defined is the center from which the Above and Below stretch outward. It is from this central position that the powers of the Above and Below can be observed and put into action. That balanced viewpoint is achieved through pure, egoless consciousness—what this rubric refers to as the One Mind.

From out-of-body and near-death experience accounts, to religious and psychedelic visions, people’s descriptions of the cosmic axis are remarkably

similar. There is always a brilliant light above and a watery darkness below. Above are archetypal forces, total knowledge, and a sense of a supreme mind or thoughtful power; below exists primordial matter, the One Thing, which is like a dense fluid that can be fashioned into anything through the action of the One Mind. Like elemental mercury, the primeval matter reflects that which is over it and can take the form of any container, even the vessel of thought alone. When acted on from Above, the One Thing is infused with the fire of consciousness, and this union of Fire and Water is the ultimate act of creation.

Within the framework of the Above and Below, there are ascending and descending forces or pathways that allow one's consciousness to journey to both realms and all levels in between. This occurs in a variety of altered states in which consciousness seems detached from the body. When we are in these separated and purified states of mind, the falseness and ugliness of our own egos—who we think we are—is made disturbingly clear. On our return to the physical world we perceive it as gray and grossly inadequate, a heaviness that traps and conceals our true spiritual nature.



*A humbled mortal breaks through to the archetypal powers of the Above.
(The Spiritual Pilgrim , a sixteenth-century German woodcut)*

The concept of higher levels determining our reality is part of the Doctrine of Correspondences expressed in this rubric. That doctrine postulates that corresponding planes of creation exist in any given situation and mirror a higher source or explanation for things. The powers of the Above and Below continue to manifest themselves in ways we cannot comprehend until we access the levels from which they emanate. Actually, this is a most concise statement of the concept of archetypes, which are primordial ideals or independent forces that impose preexisting patterns of organization on the various levels of manifest reality. “The fact that everywhere throughout the various levels of existence there are ‘vertical’ links with universal prototypes,” wrote one alchemical philosopher, “means that the cosmological view of nature—and also every art based on it—possesses a hierarchically arranged multiplicity of meanings.”²

That multiplicity of meanings is reflected in every line of the Emerald Tablet. Unfortunately, that can result in a multiplicity of interpretations that have nothing to do with the Hermetic basis of the document. For example, the hierarchy described in the Orientation Rubric is the source of the famous dictum “As Above, so Below,” a catchphrase which describes processes ranging from magical invocation to trickle-down economics. However, that interpretation acknowledges only half the equation. We are so entrained by the “pattern” taught by the Western religious traditions that we automatically aspire only to the Above and reject the Below entirely. But by severing the connection between the Above and Below, we make alchemy impossible. The Doctrine of Correspondences put forth in the Emerald Tablet really says: “As Below, so Above; As Above, so Below” and is meant to reflect not the segregation but the *flow* of the universe, such as we find in the Chinese Tao. The yin-yang symbol depicts the eternal interplay of opposing forces of light and darkness, and mind and matter, in which each contains the seed of the other. In alchemy, this concept is expressed in the Ouroboros—the snake eating its own tail—which is the sense of the translation presented in this book. According to the order of things in the Emerald Tablet, our work begins in the Below in this world, and, if successfully initiated there, the Above and Below *work together* to bring about the “miracles of the One Thing.”

Furthermore, the second rubric tells us that our everyday lives, as well as those events we perceive as miraculous, are accomplished by the natural interplay of the powers of the Above and the Below. In other words, there are no real miracles, only manifestations of the universe’s hidden laws that we do not understand. To comprehend those principles, we must first acquire the correct vertical orientation or attitude. The Emerald Tablet suggests that what we call the “spiritual” world is actually *more* real than physical reality because it exists Above and before physical manifestation. To the ancients, this subtle realm was very near at hand. They equated it with the processes of thought and imagination which they could experience within themselves simply by closing their eyes in meditation. For them, the gross physical world was still directly connected with the higher realm of mind.

The Revelation of Hermes

Hermes Trismegistus describes breaking away from material reality and traveling along the hidden cosmic axis in *The Divine Pymander (Mind of the Sovereignty)*, part of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. While meditating, Hermes enters an altered state of consciousness. “My thought was raised to a great height,” he explains, “yet my bodily senses had been put under restraint as in sleep, though not such sleep as that of men weighed down by fullness of food or bodily weariness.” Thus freed from attachment to his bodily senses, his mind begins to travel along the spiritual axis:

Forthwith all things changed in aspect before me and were opened out in a moment. And I beheld a boundless view: all was changed into light, a mild and joyous light; and I marveled when I saw it. And in a little while, there came to be in one part a downward-tending darkness, terrible and grim. And thereafter I saw the darkness changing into a watery substance, which was unspeakably tossed about. Coiling in sinuous folds, it gave forth smoke as from fire; and I heard it making an indescribable sound of lamentation, for there was sent forth from it an inarticulate cry. But from the light there came forth a holy Speech, which took its stand upon the watery substance, and methought this Word was the voice of the light. And the Divine Mind spoke for me to hear:

“That light is I, even the One Mind, the first God, who was before the watery substance which appeared out of darkness, and the Word which came forth from the light is the son of God. Learn my meaning by looking at what you yourself have in you, for in you too, the Word is son, and Mind the father of the Word. They are not separate one from the other, for life is the union of Word and Mind. Now fix your thought upon the light and learn to know it.”

I saw in my mind that the light consisted of innumerable powers and had come to be an ordered world, but a world without the bounds of material existence. This I perceived in thought, seeing it by reason of the words which the Divine Mind had spoken to me. And when I was amazed, he spoke again to me: “You have seen in your mind the archetypal form, which is prior to the beginning of things and is limitless.”

Hermes strains to apprehend the meaning of these words, and wonders how the archetypal form can determine physical reality. “But tell me,” he

asks. “Whence did the elements of nature come into being?”

“They issued from God’s Purpose,” comes the answer, “which beheld that beautiful world and copied it. The watery substance, the One Thing, having received the Word, was fashioned into an ordered world, the elements being separated out from it. And from the elements came forth the brood of living creatures. . . . And the One Mind, that Mind of Life and Light, being male and female both, gave birth to another Mind, which was a maker of things; and this made out of the elements seven planets who encompass with their orbits the world perceived by sense; and their administration is called Destiny.”

“And forthwith,” Hermes continues, “the Word of God leapt up from the downward-tending elements of nature to the pure body of the highest sphere which had already existed and united with Mind the Maker, for the Word was of one substance with that mind too. And the downward-tending elements of nature were left devoid of reason, so as to be mere matter.”

The astonishing implication of this divine message is that if you can reach the One Mind, you can change reality by transforming the One Thing, the precursor of all physical manifestation. Temporarily split off from the One Mind, the consciousness embodied in “Mind the Maker” participates in the fashioning of reality as we know it. This is the same idea as the demiurge or divine craftsman expressed in some religions. On the microcosmic scale, Mind the Maker is nothing less than the mind of man, and anyone who is centered and balanced along the cosmic axis can be in touch with the powers of both the Above and the Below.

Hermes is eager to learn more, and the Divine Mind continues to explain the details of creation, showing him all the levels of existence, from the basic four elements of matter fashioned out of the One Thing to the Eight Heavenly Spheres contained within the One Mind itself. Next, the Divine Mind reveals that man himself is a copy of the universe and contains within himself all the same levels and all the same powers of light and darkness that make up the fabric of the Above and the Below.

“And I inscribed in my memory the benefaction of the Divine Mind,” says Hermes upon leaving his altered consciousness, “and I was exceedingly glad, for I was full with that for which I craved. My bodily sleep had come to be sober wakefulness of soul; and the closing of my eyes, true vision; and my silence, pregnant with good; and my barrenness of speech, a brood of holy

thoughts. Becoming God-inspired, I attained the abode of Truth.”³

People throughout the ages have had similar encounters along the spiritual axis of reality. Jacob’s vision of the ladder, described in Genesis, is one example. After falling asleep in a field with his head on a rock, Jacob has a vision of a splendid ladder reaching into the heavens. Using the ladder, the angels (archetypal powers) are able to traverse heaven and earth. That ladder would become an oft-used image in the art of the alchemists referring to the Seven Steps of Transformation contained in the Emerald Tablet.

The twelfth-century Christian mystic Hildegard of Bingen had many visions similar to those of Hermes, in which the One Mind merged with and organized the dark chaos of the One Thing below, and she felt that God inscribed the entire divine deed on the human form. For Dominican cleric Meister Eckhart, created matter was an amalgam made up of soul and thought. “God is everywhere and is everywhere complete,” he wrote. “God is in the innermost part of each and every thing.” Eckhart described the One Thing as something separate from God, a “simple ground and still desert” without any distinctions, out of which all things were created.⁴

A modern example of traveling in this spiritual realm is that of a twenty-eight-year-old mathematics professor. After being lifted to great heights during an out-of-body experience, he reported: “All at once, without any further change, my eyes were opened. Above and in front, yet in me, of me, and around, was the Glory of the Archetypal Light. Nothing can be more truly light, since that Light makes all other light to be light; nor is it a flat material light but a creative light of life itself, streaming forth in love and understanding, and forming all other lives out of its substance. Far below, as things can be seen at these times without turning away, there appeared something like the surface of earth. But this was only for a moment, to make clear the immense height to which my soul had been raised, and her nearness to the sun.”⁵

The alchemists, whose craft was both spiritual and material in nature, actually developed step-by-step procedures for working in this rarefied realm and learning to alter reality. Over the centuries, they discovered ways of accessing the One Mind and transmuting the physical and spiritual elements through the One Thing. These transcendental operations are presented in chapters 11-17. However, before we can understand and apply the powers of

the Above and Below in our own lives, we have to try to comprehend the true nature of the One Thing through which physical, psychological, and spiritual reality is transformed.

What Is the One Thing?

The One Thing mentioned in the Orientation Rubric is really the main topic of the entire Emerald Tablet. Why is the One Thing so important? Why is the One Thing the subject and not the One Mind? Because, in essence, the Emerald Tablet is *not* a religious document. It is a practical treatise concerning a spiritual technology designed to allow man to reach his highest expression, and the tablet offers an advanced formula for personal transformation and accelerated evolution. In fact, the concluding phrase of the Orientation Rubric (*So do all created things originate from this One Thing, through Transformation*) is one of the earliest formulations of the idea of the evolution of life, many centuries before Charles Darwin was selected to be part of our species.

Balinas viewed the One Thing as a supreme force which cannot be seen and has no perceptible form until it is “grounded” in material reality by the action or thought of the One Mind, the mind of the supreme being. In nearly every religion, knowing the name of God bestows great magical power. However, the name of God is the name of the One Thing, and both are indescribable and can only be directly perceived. This fundamental principle is expressed in the ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and Ra. Isis wanted to become a goddess and knew she had to find out the true name of Ra, the supreme Sun God of Egypt, to succeed. So she fashioned a snake from the mud made when some of Ra’s saliva fell from heaven. Because the snake was made from Ra himself, its venom was the only substance that could harm him. Isis concealed the viper in the dust on a road until Ra visited Earth. When he walked by the snake, it bit him, and there was nothing he could do as the poison coursed through him. Ra felt excruciating pain for the very first time, and, in his agony, called out to the other gods for help. But only Isis came forward. “Tell me your name,” she said, “and I will cure you.” Ra tried

to trick Isis into giving him the cure, but she cleverly rebuked him. Finally, Ra said: “My name is hidden in my body. Let it pass from my heart to your heart.” By directly experiencing the ineffable magic name, Isis immediately cured Ra and became an immortal herself. The message of this myth is that the Signature of God is in all things, but it is not something we can write out or even pronounce. It is simply sharing his heart and seeking his presence. This feeling is experienced by mystics as a kind of divine love.

Surprisingly, the Old Testament gives the One Thing a voice in the eighth chapter of the *Book of Proverbs*, which many medieval alchemists considered the Biblical Emerald Tablet:

That I [the One Thing] may cause those that love me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures. The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth. While as yet He had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When He prepared the heavens, I was there. When He set a compass upon the face of the depth; when He established the clouds above; when He strengthened the fountains of the deep; when He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him.

In the eighth chapter of the *Book of Proverbs*, we see creation from the viewpoint of the One Thing; in the *Divine Pymander*, we see it through the One Mind. In both cases, it is the One Thing that is transformed to bring about new creation. If we try to picture the One Thing, it appears as a chaotic mass, full of churning, primordial energy such as that described in the revelation of Hermes. It also seems to be a preexisting “given” in the evolution of the universe as described in the Bible. The One Thing is completely autonomous and dependent on nothing for its existence. Usually invisible, the One Thing can also be thought of as a Morphic Field, an interdimensional force that is part of the very fabric of space. When actually perceived by individuals, it takes on a variety of forms that often depend on a person’s unconscious expectations. Moses saw it as a “bush that burned with fire and was not consumed,” while modern man is likely to conceive of it as a fire in the sky or a UFO.



Archetypes from the One Mind refashion the chaos of the One Thing.
(Michel de Marolles, *Tableaux du Temple des Muses, Paris 1655*)

Over the last two millennia, alchemists have written millions of words trying to describe the One Thing in terms of their First Matter, a theoretical substance everywhere to be found (see the following section). Perhaps the simplest description, however, is given in the 2,500-year-old words of the Chinese sage Lao Tsu: “There is a Thing confusedly formed, born before sky and earth. In the silence and the void, standing alone and unchanging, ever present and in motion, it is capable of being the mother of all.”⁶

The Elusive First Matter

For the alchemists, the One Thing was the *Prima Materia*, or First Matter, the common source of all things on all levels. This plastic, morphing, chaotic *massa confusa* was essentially irrepresentable, though that did not stop them from trying to describe it. Sometimes they referred to the First Matter as the “Earth of Paradise,” which they depicted as a pair of poisonous serpents or fire-breathing dragons to emphasize its bisexual nature and to warn other alchemists that it could be dangerous for mortals to handle the heavenly earth. The alchemists also portrayed the First Matter as the “Root of Itself,” and its primary symbol became the Ouroboros. Drawings of the Ouroboros carried captions reading “All Is One” or “One Thing Is All.” The circular snake was sometimes shown with a half-light and half-dark body, alluding to the opposing principles of creation depicted in the yin-yang symbol of the Chinese Tao, which is yet another classic symbol of the One Thing. Sometimes the same idea was portrayed by two fighting dragons at each other’s throats, releasing inherent male and female energies that recombine in their shared blood. The principle expressed in the Dueling Dragons and the Ouroboros is that ultimately the One Mind and the One Thing are the same, eternally flowing into one another in an endless Möbius loop of creation.

“Here is the mystery,” declared an ancient Greek alchemy text. “The serpent Ouroboros is the composition which in our Work is devoured and

melted, dissolved and transformed. It becomes dark green from which the golden color derives. Its stomach and back are the color of saffron; its head is dark green, its four legs are the four imperfect metals [lead, copper, tin, and iron]; its three ears are the three sublimated vapors [Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt]. The One gives the Other its blood; and the One engenders the Other. Nature rejoices in nature; nature charms nature; nature triumphs over nature; and nature masters nature; and this is not from one nature opposing another, but through the one and same nature, through the alchemical process, with great care and great effort.”⁷

Alchemical drawings depict the First Matter in a variety of other forms. Some show it as a square stone while others depict eight-pointed stars or luminous spheres. In fact, the *Lexicon of Alchemy*, first published in 1612, gives eighty-four synonyms for the First Matter. Among the most significant code words were: Philosopher’s Stone, Ore of Hermes, Bird of Hermes, Tartar of the Philosophers, Water of Life, Milk of Virgin, Urine of Boys, Spittle of the Moon, Celestial Dew, Virtue of Mercury, Heart of the Sun, the Rainbow, Flower of the Sun, Seed of the World, Shadow of the Sun, Sulfur of Nature, Son of the Sun and Moon, Soul of Saturn, Spiritual Blood, the Sacrificial Lamb, Grapes of the Vine, Menstruum, the Bride, the Salamander, the Ugly Toad, and Dung.⁸

Not surprisingly, it is said that all who have written about the First Matter concealed its true nature. However, we do get the distinct impression that the First Matter is a subtle substance rejected or taken for granted by most people. “Our material is stuff of no price or value,” declares one alchemist. “Whoever comes across it hardly troubles to pick it up. Much money does not buy it; it is thrown in the ways of both poor and rich.” Alchemists often commented that the First Matter is something that all of us discard in our youth as having no value, when in fact it is one of the most powerful things we encounter in life—although it hides at the edge of reality, balanced between physical and nonphysical being. One of the authors in the twelfth-century *Turba Philosophorum (The Assembly of Philosophers)* describes it as “a thing which is found everywhere, which is a stone and no stone, contemptible and precious, hidden, concealed, and yet known to everyone.” Then he adds: “It is a thing stronger and more sublime than all other things.”⁹

“It is familiar to all men, both young and old,” explains the author of

Gloria Mundi: Paradeiss Taffel (Glory of the World: The Emerald Tablet). “It is found in the country, in the village, in the town, in all things created by God; yet it is despised by all. Rich and poor handle it every day. It is cast into the street by servant maids. Children play with it. Yet no one prizes it, though, next to the human soul, it is the most beautiful and the most precious thing upon earth and has the power to pull down kings and princes.” “There is a secret stone,” echoes another alchemist, “hidden in a deep well, worthless and rejected, concealed in dung or filth.” “Our most precious stone,” laments yet another, “cast forth upon the dunghill, being most dear, is made the vilest of the vile.”¹⁰

What sort of a definition can we put together from all these odd descriptions of the First Matter? The very first expression of matter is the outline of its form, the image of it within the One Mind. That image-making power of consciousness is known as imagination, though the ancients would have referred to it as the Word or Thought of God. According to the Emerald Tablet, that power is reflected in the Below in the mind of man. The alchemists believed that the common act of imagination was somehow connected to the transformation of matter. They suspected that the imagination, in all its chaotic forms—from the horrifying creatures of nightmares to the lofty visions of science—is at the heart of the First Matter. It is the imagination that we discard in our youth as having no value; it is the imagination that is familiar to all, both rich and poor; it is the imagination which is hidden and yet known to everyone; it is the imagination that is “a stone and no stone.”

If we look up the definition of imagination in the *Lexicon of Alchemy*, we read that “imagination is the Star in Man, the celestial or supercelestial body.” Therefore, the imagination is a divine gift, the piece of heaven concealed in man. The student in alchemy comes to realize the secret power of imagination during solitary meditation. As the author of the *Rosarium Philosophorum (Rosary of the Philosophers, Frankfurt, 1550)* advises: “Take care that your door is well and firmly closed, so that he who is within cannot escape, and, God willing, you will reach the goal. Nature carries out her operations gradually; and indeed I would have you do the same: let your imagination be guided wholly by nature, through whom the bodies regenerate themselves in the bowels of the earth. And imagine this with true and not

with fantastic imagination.”

What the alchemists called the First Matter was grounded in the pure image-making ability of our minds that knows no bounds, that has no singular characteristic other than its ability to take on all characteristics. But by the term “imagination” they meant a special kind of mental imagery or visualization that is directly connected to the ground of reality. Imagination without that connection is simple fantasy. Alas, we are taught to discard our True Imagination and sever our ties to the hidden reality while we are still children. In most modern societies, schools and churches serve only to destroy our personal link to “the gods” and replace it with their own dogma. That is why Balinas made such an effort to renew the connection between the True Imagination and the One Thing in all types of religious communities, for it is the *connection* with the Above and not a religious sect’s popularity that really counts. Though the word “imagination” is never mentioned, one of the clearest definitions of the First Matter is found in an alchemy text dating from 1625 called the *Sophic Hydrolith (Water Stone of the Wise)*:

“The First Matter is found in One Thing, out of which alone our Stone is prepared. They also call it the Seed of the World, from which all natural objects take their origin. Its properties are of a singular kind; for, in addition to its marvelous nature and form, it is neither hot and dry like Fire, nor cold and wet like Water, nor cold and dry like Earth, but a perfect preparation of all the elements. With respect to its outward appearance, they call it a stone, and not a stone. It is found potentially everywhere, and in everything, but in all its perfection and fullness only in One Thing. By the ignorant and the beginner it is thought to be the vilest and meanest of things. It is sought by many sages and found by few; suspected by those that are far away, and received by those that are near; seen by all but known by few.”¹¹

This is the True Imagination, the fundamental morphable energy of pure consciousness. It can be thought of as a swirling mass of heavy energy on the brink of materialization, or as a slimy beast from which all other life evolves, or as a chemically metallic water waiting to fill any container (or thought). The First Matter is the primal One Thing of the Emerald Tablet, the preexisting matrix of matter before it is acted on by the One Mind. As we shall see, the author of the Emerald Tablet tells us exactly where to find this primordial matter in the next rubric.

[1](#) The Emerald Tablet used in this book is a new translation based on original Latin and German texts, as well as on various Alexandrian and Hermetic interpretations. The Latin version accepted by most modern scholars is that used by Carl Jung in his alchemy seminars:

Verum, sine mendacio, certum et verissimum. Quod est inferius, est sicut quod est superius, et quod est superius, est sicut quod inferius, ad perpetranda miracula rei unius. Et sicut omnes res fuerunt ab uno, meditatione unius, sic omnes res natae fuerunt ab hac uno re, adaptatione. Pater eius est Sol, Mater eius Luna; Portavit illud ventus in ventre suo; nutrix eius terra est. Pater omnis telesmi totius mundi est hic; vis eius integra est, si versa fuerit in terram. Separabis terra ab igne, subtile a spisso, suaviter, cum magno ingenio. Ascendit a terra in coelum, interumque descendit in terram, et recipit vim superiorum et inferiorum. Sic habebis gloriam totius mundi. Ideo fugiat a te omnis obscuritas. Hic est totius fortitudinis fortitudo fortis; quia vincet omnem subtilem, omnemque solidam penetrabit. Sic mundus creatus est. Hinc adaptationes erunt mirabiles, quarum modus est hic. Itaque vocatus sum Hermes Trismegistus, habens tres partes Philosophiae totius mundi. Completum est quod dixi de operatione Solis.

[2](#) From Titus Burckhardt, *Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos* (New York: Penguin, 1974).

[3](#) Adapted from *Libellis I: The Poimandres of Hermes Trismegistus*, translated by Walter Scott in *Hermetica Volume I* (Boston: Shambala, 1985) and *Poimandres the Shepherd of Men*, translated by G. R. S. Mead in *Thrice Greatest Hermes* (Kila, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1995). “Pymander” is the popularized spelling of Poimandres.

[4](#) Jacob’s vision is described in Genesis 28:12. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was the abbess of Rupertsberg, Germany, who related her cosmic visions in a book called *Scivias* (Germany, 1151), which has been translated by Bruce Hozeski (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear & Co., 1995). Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) was charged with heresy in 1326, but by recanting his “errors,” he insured his works would not be burned by the church. See *The Selected Writings of Meister Eckhart*, translated by Oliver Davies (New York: Penguin, 1994).

[5](#) From J. H. M. Whiteman, *The Mystic Life* as reprinted in J. M. Cohen and J. F. Phipps, *The Common Experience* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher,

1979).

[6](#) Moses' encounter is described in Exodus 3:2, and the definition of the First Matter is from the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tsu (China, Sixth Century B.C.E.).

[7](#) First translated by Marcellin Berthelot in *Collection des Anciens Alchimistes Grecians* (Paris, 1860) and recently published in Cherry Gilchrist, *The Elements of Alchemy* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991).

[8](#) From Martin Ruland, *A Lexicon of Alchemy*, translated by A. E. Waite (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1984). The book was originally published in 1612 as *Lexicon Alchemiae*.

[9](#) *Gloria Mundi* was first published in Frankfort in 1620. The first quote is from Johann Conrad Barchusen, *Elementa Chemiae* (Germany, 1718). The second quote, from *Turba Philosophorum*, was translated by Julius Ruska (Berlin, 1931).

[10](#) The second author quoted is Johann Daniel Mylius in *Philosophia Reformata* (Frankfort, 1622). The last quote is from Mary A. Atwood, *Tractatus Aureus*, translated in *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy* (New York: AMS Press, 1960).

[11](#) From *The Sophic Hydrolith* published along with twenty-one other alchemical tracts in *The Hermetic Museum* (Frankfort, 1625). See Arthur Edward Waite, *The Hermetic Museum* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1991).



Chapter 5 ITS FATHER IS THE SUN

Rubric's Cube

The Opus Magnum or “Great Work” of the alchemists centered around solving the puzzle contained in the third rubric of the Emerald Tablet. This part of the tablet presents the Grand Conundrum, the ultimate “Rubric’s Cube,” and many alchemists spent their lives trying to find the mysterious substance that this rubric describes. The alchemists saw in the third rubric a perfect description of the One Thing as it is manifested in the physical world. They viewed the One Thing as a spiritually charged presence that could be manipulated, even though it was not always visible, and believed that it naturally evolved to higher levels of organization over time. Thanks to the methods revealed in the Emerald Tablet, they felt they could speed up this natural evolutionary process. Using the same methods, they theorized, noble metals like gold could be produced from baser metals like lead, and the alchemist’s soul, which was the One Thing in man, could, by extension, be raised to perfection too, since the principles of transformation were universal.

Understanding the nature of the One Thing as revealed in this rubric is crucial to working with the rest of the tablet. As we learned in the Orientation Rubric, the One Thing is the subject and focus of the entire document, and the pronoun “it” throughout the tablet refers back to the One Thing first mentioned there and elaborated here. The gathering and transmutation of the One Thing is the exclusive subject of the Emerald Tablet, as this enigmatic rubric demonstrates:

*Its father is the Sun;
Its mother the Moon.
The Wind carries it in its belly;
Its nurse is the Earth.
It is the Origin of All,*

*the consecration of the Universe;
Its inherent Strength is perfected,
if it is turned into Earth.*



The father of the One Thing is the Sun; its mother, the Moon. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfort 1617)

The rubric conveys a feeling of some inscrutable force being born. It was very titillating to the alchemists because they believed it contained instructions for accumulating and purifying the First Matter, which is what they called the One Thing. By using that term, they emphasized that it was a preexisting *substance*, hidden in the everyday world, with which they could work. Their drawings often depict the First Matter as a square stone or cube

that sometimes dangles by a rope from above. Called the Cubic Stone, it is part of the sacred geometry of space and is both the subject and the solution of the third rubric. In *Philosophia Sagax* (Sagacious Philosophy of the Great and Small World, 1537) the German alchemist Paracelsus wrote: “Know therefore that the said First Matter is ultimately nothing but an [invisible] box full of great force and power.”

How do we find the hidden First Matter? We must become wise, a “sage like myself ” in the words of Hermes, to recognize it. Even today, most people overlook it or regard it as worthless. The First Matter is part of the magic connection to nature that we lost when we became “adulterated”—both as individuals and as societies—and explains the cultural wasteland in which we find ourselves. The miraculous First Matter is “the corner stone which the builders rejected.”

Just as eight vertices define the Cubic Stone, so do the eight lines of this section of the Emerald Tablet define Rubric’s Cube, and by examining the riddle in these words, we can isolate the material required to begin alchemical transformation. Nothing was more important to the alchemists than this First Matter, for without accumulating enough of this fleeting substance, all their experiments, whether physical, psychological, or spiritual in nature, were doomed to failure.

Four Elements from the One Thing

According to the ancients, the First Matter has a fourfold structure which they attributed to the existence of four archetypal forces or elements of creation, which they named Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. Obviously, the four elements of the alchemists are not our everyday ideas of earth, water, air, and fire; nor would any alchemist have proposed that all matter was made up of combinations of those common substances. It is as if the One Mind imposed a fourfold image on the One Thing to incarnate or create matter. The four elements are named for those fundamental archetypes within matter and are symbolic of the hidden qualities of physical reality as revealed in the tablet. The sequence of the creation of the elements from the One Thing is revealed

in the third rubric. Fire is mentioned first, then Water, Air, and Earth.

The Polish alchemist Michael Sendivogius (1566-1636) summarized this view of the Emerald Tablet when he said: “There are four [common] elements, and each has at its center another element [the archetype] which makes it what it is. These are the four pillars of the world. They were in the beginning evolved and molded out of chaos [the One Thing] by the hand of the Creator; and it is their contrary action which keeps up the harmony and equilibrium of the mundane machinery of the universe; it is they which, through the virtue of celestial influences, produce all things above and beneath the earth.”¹

Since before the days of Socrates, the four elements have been described not in terms of physical structure but by the metaphysical qualities that each possesses. Aristotle considered Fire as made up of the qualities of hot and dry; Water was cold and moist; Earth was cold and dry; Air was moist and hot. All the elements originated by impressing certain qualities on the First Matter, and one element could be changed into another by altering those qualities. For instance, when the qualities of moist and cold are imposed on the First Matter, the element water results, but if we boil water, it is changed into air (steam) by substituting the quality of hot for that of cold.

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) spent his life searching for evidence of the fundamental relationship between archetype and reality and concluded that the four elements resulted from “material image-making,” or “the materialization of imagery,” within the mind of God. Bachelard also looked at the interaction of the elements from the point of view of what each sought. “Earthly joy is riches and impediment,” he said. “Aquatic joy is softness and repose; fiery pleasure is desire and love; airy delight is liberty and movement.” Nobel Prize-winning poet T. S. Eliot tackled the relationship between the elements in *Four Quartets*, four poems that successively deal with each of the elements. By his art, he was able to express our most intimate relationship with the elements, capturing the irreconcilable tension between the entrapment of our essences in imperfect matter and our desire to escape the prison of time and space imposed by the four elements.



The alchemist must learn to control the four elements. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfurt 1617)

Carl Jung believed the four elements represent an archetypal quaternity of the highest order, so deeply ingrained in the human psyche that each of us is unconsciously driven by the search for the perfect balance or integration of these elements in our lives. For Jung, Fire represented the thinking function, Air the intuition function, Water the feeling function, and Earth the sensation function. He considered Fire and Air the active, masculine elements and Water and Earth the passive, feminine elements. He believed it is the degree of development of each of the four elements in our psyche, balanced with the unconscious retention of the remaining elements, that determines our personality and attitude. In other words, this indwelling fourfold structure originates from the creation of ego out of the chaos of the unconscious, just

as the fourfold structure of the universe was created by the action of the One Mind on the One Thing. This basic truth is derived from the Doctrine of Correspondences in the Emerald Tablet.

So, on all levels of reality—physical, mental, and spiritual—everything is made up of a unique combination of the four elements, and everything in the universe is striving for a complete and balanced expression of these elements as imposed by the image-making capacity (the thoughts or the Word) of the One Mind. Perhaps the simplest way to understand this is to look within ourselves and observe the four elements there. Socrates’ dictum “know thyself” is really just another rendering of the Doctrine of Correspondences, and the idea that we could know the universe by knowing ourselves became a powerful tool of the alchemists, who, in truth, were the founders not only of chemistry but also of systematic psychology.

Fire: Its Father Is the Sun

What do we mean when we say that the father of the One Thing is the Sun? The capitalized “Sun” in this sentence refers to the higher archetype of our own galactic sun, a deeply ingrained pattern that shows itself in the universe and within our spirits. The solar archetype also repeats itself in the ruling principle of the individual psyche, in the patriarch of the family, and socially in the kings and rulers of countries. Just as the life of the king determines the quality of life of his subjects, the solar archetype is manifested in man as the king of his personality or the ruling ego complex that controls his mental environment. Whether seen as a star or king or a part of one’s personality, the sun is the source of the “elements” which form the planets, kingdoms, and our individual personalities or temperaments.

Some astrologers refer to the ultimate solar presence as the White Sun, which can be interpreted astronomically as an exploding supernova or metaphysically as the brilliant white light encountered on the “Other Side” in mystical and near-death experiences. In their chemical-spiritual formulae, the alchemists thought of this highest Sun as the perfected First Matter and represented it graphically as a circle with a dot at its center. That same

symbol also stood for the perfect metal, gold, and is derived from the ancient Egyptian glyph for the midday sun.

The archetype of the Sun embodies the Fire element, which carries with it many associations with the powers of the Above. Fire is always seen as an active force, characteristic of the masculine Spirit, as opposed to the element of Water, which corresponds to the feminine Soul. The Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Hindus, Mayans, Celts, and native peoples throughout the world worshipped the Sun as their most important god, the Great Patriarch. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Sun is a powerful underlying archetype representing God in heaven. In many religions, including Christianity, the conjugation of Fire and Water—of Spirit on the Water—is the primal act of creation. Blazing Fire is God’s Will, the archetypal union of willpower and energy. For that reason, Fire is said to have originated in heaven and came to earth as lightning (or, in many myths, it was stolen from heaven by man). In other legends, fire originates from the sexual acts of the gods and is often associated with uncontrollable passions like love and hate. Hellfire represents the agony of creation—the presence of divine Fire trapped in matter. Thus Fire is a dangerous and contradictory force that on all levels can destroy or renew, char or purify. The alchemists thought of Fire in much the same way that we look at energy, and they would certainly agree with modern physicists who tell us that everything around us is really frozen energy, which can be neither created nor destroyed, only transformed. The creative power of Fire was summed up by the early Greek alchemist Heraclitus (540-475 B.C.E.): “Everything becomes Fire, and from Fire everything is born.”

The alchemical procedure, or laboratory operation, corresponding to Fire is Calcination, the first process in transformation. Calcination is the reduction of a substance to ashes, and it requires an intense flame to succeed. Alchemists were known as Philosophers of Fire because they believed they could transform any substance if they had a fire that was hot enough, and they built elaborate furnaces hoping to duplicate the temperatures of the sun. They spent many lonely hours sitting next to their furnaces, vigorously fanning huge bellows over the flames, which is why they earned the derisive nickname of “puffers.”

Psychologically, Calcination represents the burning off of the dross of the personality to reveal one’s soul. This essence is a person’s First Matter, from

which he or she develops in their lifetime. But to perfect the soul, we must expose it, and that can only be accomplished through the often painful process of Calcination, in which the ego and its attachments to the material world are eliminated. Most often, this occurs naturally in our lives as we are stripped down to our essence through what Hamlet called the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” We will learn how to use Calcination to deliberately free ourselves from self-deception in chapter 11 (“Calcination: Burning Off the Dross”). However, it might be worthwhile to first get a feeling for this operation by taking a look at a person who is still undergoing the process. Of all the people I have worked with over the years, I can think of no better example of Calcination than a struggling Canadian actor who went on to become a modern icon.

The Calcination of William Shatner

The captain of the starship *Enterprise* contacted me in 1976 and asked if I would assist him in the making of a documentary film about ancient astronauts and UFOs called *Mysteries of the Gods*. *Star Trek* star William Shatner interviewed me on-camera about various aspects of ufology, and we traveled together through Virginia and New York tracking down UFO witnesses and talking with scientists involved in the search for extraterrestrial life. But the film was more than just another job for Shatner. He was intensely interested in the UFO phenomenon and eager to find people who believed they were in contact with aliens. The reason? He believed he had himself been contacted by a cosmic intelligence.²

To understand what happened to Shatner, we have to take a closer look at the personality of this multifaceted man. Born in 1931 in Montreal, Shatner was the only son in an upper-middle-class Jewish household. At an early age, he discovered the power of acting to get hold of people’s emotions, and by the tender age of eight he had made his professional acting debut. He continued to act all through high school and college. After graduation, he joined the prestigious Stratford Shakespearean Festival in Ontario, and a few years later he started appearing in live television plays in the United States.

He went on to star in several Broadway shows, seventy movies, and over two hundred television programs.

Shatner always seemed to know exactly what he wanted, and, as a child, he earned the nickname “Toughy” because of his reputation for defending his pride and goals against anyone who got in the way. As an actor, he was known for bickering with directors and treating other actors with contempt, and he soon gained a reputation for having one of the biggest egos in Hollywood. Because of his egomania, he frequently demanded that scenes be redone to feature him more prominently, and his shouting matches with other actors and directors caused several to quit working with him altogether.

However, in 1967, Shatner’s ego embarked on a collision course with destiny. Just as he was getting closer to his stern father after years of estrangement, the elder Shatner had a heart attack and died while on vacation in Miami. In the plane taking his father’s body back to Montreal, his grieving son stared out the window and confronted his own mortality. “I was looking out the window,” Shatner recalled, “but what I was really doing was looking into myself. What I saw was an empty pit, and it terrified me. I suddenly saw how the insane go insane! They see reality for one terrifying, fleeting moment; they take off the rose-colored glasses. Maybe we’d all go insane if we took off the rose-colored glasses.”

Those rose-colored glasses were Shatner’s ego, and it was slowly being chipped away. Within a few months, the NBC television network let it be known that they were going to cancel the *Star Trek* series, which had become the focal point of Shatner’s energies and hopes. At the same time, his marriage was unraveling, and his wife of thirteen years filed for divorce. His alimony payments, which were based on his *Star Trek* salary, were enormous, plus he was allowed to visit his three daughters only on weekends. The imperial Captain Kirk ended up living like a pauper in a two-bedroom house that he completely furnished for less than \$300. Eventually, he would be forced to live in a pickup camper as he drove around looking for work in summer-stock productions. “I was insane,” Shatner said of this period, “like the way an animal is insane, because I had lost my family, I’d lost everything, and I was scrambling, clawing to get everything back and put it together.”

Right in the middle of all this, Shatner had a paranormal experience that he would spend the next ten years trying to comprehend. In an effort to escape from his multitude of worries, Shatner started taking long motorcycle

trips in the Mojave Desert with friends. One morning, however, he got separated from his companions when his motorcycle hit something and he was thrown to the ground. Oddly enough, his four friends thought he was still with them; they all assumed a dark figure on a motorcycle some distance behind them was Shatner. The mysterious figure stayed with them for over two hours before disappearing.

As Shatner lay on the ground getting his bearings, he also experienced something strange. He said it was like a nightmare in which you feel something crawling all over your body. He then lost consciousness, and the next thing he remembered was feeling a tingling blast of light and finding himself lying next to his motorcycle again. Though Shatner was unable to start his bike, he could push it in one direction only—toward a dark figure waving him on from a ridge on the horizon. He followed the stranger for some time, then suddenly lost sight of him. At that moment, Shatner noticed a glistening, tambourine-shaped UFO in the sky, and just below it, he saw the towering sign from a gas station, the only refuge for fifty miles around.

The baffled actor could not account for six hours of time he had been lost in the 110-degree desert heat, nor could he identify the dark figure who led him to safety. Then he started having weird dreams of voiceless communications with beautiful humanoids in a tambourine-shaped craft. Publicly, he criticized the government's handling of UFO reports and demanded that whatever was known be released. He planned to make a short film of his experience and tried to come to terms with it in a record album entitled "The Transformed Man." His emotional reading of the lyrics to the popular songs "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" and "Mr. Tambourine Man" expressed his desire to return to the aliens. "Take me on a trip in your magic, swirling ship," he bellowed. "My senses have been stripped!"³ Not surprisingly, music critics thought Shatner had lost his mind or was taking drugs.

By the time Shatner contacted me, he was getting a little impatient. He thought he was chosen to lead earth into contact with an extraterrestrial civilization and could not understand why they had not returned for him. He wanted to be put in touch with people who were in telepathic contact with alien intelligences. He even asked what I thought about The Two, a couple who were traveling throughout the United States recruiting members to be

taken aboard a UFO and leave the planet. Now known as Heaven's Gate, the couple's movement at the time was called HIM, which stood for Human Individual Metamorphosis. In September 1975, I attended one of their recruitment meetings in Waldport, Oregon. Marshall Applewhite was going by the name of "Bo," and Bonnie Nettles called herself "Peep," and they claimed to be two UFO beings from "the next level above human," here to help us all make the transition. They said they were the "two witnesses who will prophesy" from Revelations, and predicted that they would both die "by assassination" and be resurrected by a UFO after three days. "Each true seeker of the next kingdom," Applewhite informed the audience, "must literally walk out the door of his life, leaving behind his career, security, loved ones and every single attachment in order to go through the remaining experiences needed to totally wean him from his needs at the human level."

What was appealing about his message was that it had the ring of truth. The process of Calcination that burns through our egocentric world so we can move on to a higher level can be sudden, violent, and disruptive to the status quo. The problem is that this is a natural spiritual process that takes place within the chemistry of the individual. The fires of Calcination do not ignite and continue to burn unless you light them yourself within yourself. No guru, no prophet, no god, and no alien can do this for you and make it last. I recommended that Shatner forget about The Two.

"They travel around in a 1964 Pontiac," I explained, "and communicate with members by a network of secret post office boxes. It just doesn't seem all that advanced to me. Plus, they have been identified as a couple from Texas, not outer space. He is the son of a Presbyterian minister, and she worked as a nurse. Both have had some minor run-ins with the law."

I suspect that if there really are advanced civilizations in the universe, they have passed through the operations of spiritual alchemy and would not need to come on to us like used-car salesmen. Perhaps the Tambourine Man didn't take Shatner along because the proud human was just not done cooking yet. Adulterous affairs with guest stars from his *T.J. Hooker* series resulted in two multimillion dollar palimony suits that led to his second divorce, and the recent vitriolic memoirs by his former *Star Trek* costars, whom he has referred to as the "Seven Dwarves," have further stripped him of his heroic veneer. Apparently, the calcining fires of William Shatner's ego still burn.

Water: Its Mother Is the Moon

Since the dawn of man, the moon has been associated with the qualities of receptivity, moisture, and fertility, and we experience lunar energies as cool, refreshing, reflective, and calm. For centuries, people believed that dew rained down from the moon at night, and in the waxing and waning of the moon, we sense an almost biological presence with its own sexuality. There is something inherently mysterious about this silvery sphere. Not only does it follow its own twenty-eight-day cycle, but it changes shape and grows through periods, and compared to the sun, behaves in “irregular” ways. In Hermetic texts, the Moon is often used as a symbol of the One Thing, just as the Sun symbolizes the One Mind which rose up out of the primal chaos to create the Above and the Below.

As king, the Sun rules the Above, while his queen, the Moon, rules the Below. Just as the sun is the daylight of our conscious world, so does the moon belong to the night, the realm of the unconscious powers. Because of this connection with the Other Side, the moon is also associated with fantasy, dreams, magical influences, and even madness. In the Middle Ages, it was thought that sleep-walking was caused by a lunar trance that could be prevented by sealing out moonlight from bedrooms, and many superstitions center around the belief that overexposure to the moon can cause “lunacy.” Among Greenlanders, women are forbidden to look at the moon for any length of time. Men there believe it causes their women to act strangely and want to engage in orgies. In medieval Europe, people believed that exposure to the full moon caused some men to turn into werewolves, and in modern times, an increase in crime and accidents is blamed on the moon’s fullest phase.

Another aspect of the lunar archetype is the idea of resurrection. For three nights the moon “disappears” and returns on the fourth night, as the crescent moon grows out of the invisible new moon. It is almost as if the moon has made a journey to the Other Side and returned to live again. In fact, the Greeks, Persians, and Hindus considered the moon a “regenerating receptacle

of souls.” According to Plutarch, upon death, our body falls into the earth, our spirit flies up to the sun, and our soul returns to the bowl of the crescent moon.

The scores of deities associated with the moon have all been female. The Egyptian Isis, Babylonian Ishtar, Persian Anahita, Greek Selene, Roman Diana, Mayan Ixchel, Asian Kwannon, and Chinese Heng-ugo are just a few of the feminine personifications of the lunar archetype. Most of these goddesses exhibit a triple presence, having the ability to appear as a maiden, a matron, and an old hag. Hermes is the one god that is associated with both the sun and the moon and for that reason is considered androgynous; as “thrice greatest,” he shares the triple form associated with lunar goddesses. In fact, in the pagan tradition, the sacred day of the Triple Goddess (May 24) is also the feast day of Hermes Trismegistus.

In our patriarchal world, the feminine powers are often depicted as inferior or even evil. Opposing the “good” White Sun is an imaginary point in the heavens that for ages astrologers have called the Black Moon. The Black Moon spews forth black flames that absorb and annihilate any light falling upon it. Like recently discovered black holes in outer space, which suck up all light, the Black Moon consumes our spiritual energy. If it falls in your astrological house, it is an omen of early death. However, if you can surrender totally to the Black Moon and sublimate its energy, it signifies a supremely powerful and supernatural life. From the Hermetic viewpoint, the Black Moon is no less glorious than the White Sun. The alchemists saw the lunar archetype as the volatile or mutable principle that was a necessary part of transformation. The extremes of the White Sun and Black Moon are both part of the interplay of the Above and the Below in which spiritual energy is never destroyed, only transformed. The glyph representing the Black Moon is two crescent moons set point-to-point with a dot at the center. Called the Unicorn’s Eye, it looks very similar to the circle with a dot at the center that stands for the White Sun.⁴

The archetypal element associated with the Moon is Water, and the corresponding alchemical operation is Dissolution. Not only does the moon dissolve before our eyes in the sky every month, but lunar energies are felt as a breaking down of rational structures and established belief systems. By immersing oneself in water in an initiation rite or baptism, one is cleansing

and dissolving old ideas and habits to regenerate new patterns. Water symbolizes the dissolving power of the liquid state as well as the property of cleansing, even when it takes place on the apocalyptic scale of the Great Flood. Because water is the primal, undifferentiated, unshaped liquid, it really stands for all the possibilities of creation and the infinite potential of the One Thing. Water is symbolic of the freedom of matter to change, and, in alchemy, is a synonym for the chaotic First Matter at the beginning of the Great Work, which can be accessed and transmuted by the alchemist. We will learn to release the amazing properties of this powerful watery essence within us in chapter 12 (“Dissolution: Learning to Let Go”). For now, we will examine how personal Dissolution can open up a direct link to the powers Above.

The Dissolution of Teresa de Cepeda

Teresa de Cepeda was born in 1515 in Avila, Spain. One of ten children of a Toledo merchant and his second wife, the girl felt secure and centered within her large family. However, the death of her beloved mother when Teresa was fourteen years old initiated her Calcination, and she soon told her father that she wanted to withdraw from the world and join a convent. Her father forbade her to leave home, and it was not until Teresa reached the age of twenty that she was finally able to enter the Carmelite Convent at Avila. Less than two years after becoming a nun, Teresa contracted a devastating disease, probably a virulent form of tuberculosis, that sapped her of energy and left her near death—in a state of Dissolution—for the next three years.

“My fainting fits began to increase in number,” she wrote, describing the progress of the disease, “and I suffered so much from heart trouble that everyone who saw me was alarmed. Sometimes the pain in my heart was so great that I felt as if sharp teeth had hold of me, and so severe was the pain that it was feared I was going mad. Then I was given purgatives and became so wasted away the doctors said my nerves had shrunk, causing an intolerable pain which gave me no rest by night or by day. I hardly ever seemed to be fully conscious, and sometimes I lost consciousness altogether. I had one fit

which left me unconscious for four days, and there must have been times when they were sure I was dead, for afterwards I actually found some wax on my eyelids from the Sacrament.”⁵

Teresa’s illness only got worse and resulted in a state of catalepsy which left her paralyzed for over eight months. It would take another thirty months for the effects of the paralysis on her legs to completely subside. Overcome by the powers of disease, Teresa reached deep inside herself to find the will to survive. She tapped into powerful emotional energies through meditation and prayer, and eventually conquered the invasive illness and established a mystical pathway that would completely change the way she approached life. Teresa’s devastating disease started a process of psychological Dissolution that would continue within her for the next twenty years and eventually open up within her a channel to the Above. She began speaking of a “heavenly rain” that came unexpectedly to “soak and saturate my whole garden [but which] in the beginning almost always comes after long mental prayer.” As her Dissolution progressed, she started having increasingly vivid visions of another reality coexistent with the everyday world. She said that her states of mystical union occurred when everything dissolved within her except the experience itself, which was always beyond words. “The soul cannot make it known,” she concluded, “even if it wants to.”

When Teresa did speak of what was happening to her, she usually described an interior Diamond Castle in which the alchemy of her transformation progressed. “I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond,” she wrote, “in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many mansions.” The various rooms of the castle were the degrees of Calcination and Dissolution through which the soul must pass before attaining the innermost chamber—the Holy of Holies, the place of complete transfiguration and union with God. In 1558, Teresa achieved that union in an ecstatic vision in which she experienced the overwhelming presence of the “sorely wounded Christ” and realized the transformative power of divine passion.

After that, the heavens seemed to open up to her, and she repeatedly experienced rapturous union with God. Sometimes, she even physically levitated—an event she felt embarrassed by and prayed would not happen. “Once, it took place when we were all together in the choir,” she admitted in

her autobiography, “and I was on my knees, about to take communion. My rising into the air distressed me very much, for it seemed a most extraordinary thing and likely to arouse considerable talk. So I ordered the nuns not to speak of it. On other occasions, when I felt that the Lord was about to enrapture me again, and once in particular during a sermon—it was our patron’s feast and some great ladies were present—I lay on the ground and the sisters came to hold me down, but all the same the rapture was observed. Then I earnestly beseeched the Lord to grant me no more favors if they must have outward and visible signs. For worries on this score exhausted me, yet whenever He gave me these raptures I was observed. It seemed to me that when I tried to resist, a great force, for which I can find no comparison, was lifting me up from beneath my feet. It came with greater violence than any other spiritual experience, and left me quite shattered.”

Teresa did not feel such displays of spiritual power were appropriate because they invoked ego and made it look like the power was within the individual, when in fact it originated from God. For her, personal Dissolution was the key to union with God, and it was an attitude that could be acquired as easily through selfless service to others as it could through the most devout and self-serving prayer.

“When I see people very anxious to know what sort of prayer they should practice,” she wrote, “covering their faces and afraid to move or think lest they should lose any slight tenderness and devotion they feel, I know how little they understand how to obtain union with God since they think it consists in such things as these. Instead, treat the sick with compassion, feel other’s pain as your own; where there is need, fast so that others may eat. This is the true union of our will with the will of God.”

Teresa attempted to reform the Carmelite order to reflect her conviction that vows of poverty, meditation on divine law, and selfless works pleased God more than beautiful churches and worldly power. Her plan to establish new convents was approved by Pope Pius IV in 1562, and she eventually founded seventeen Unshod (“shoeless”) Carmelite Convents. In 1567, she enlisted Juan de Yepes (later canonized as St. John of the Cross) to help her spread her doctrines in the seminaries of the Carmelite Order. However, in 1575, a jurisdictional dispute between the Shod and Unshod Carmelites resulted in her being confined to a convent in Castile and de Yepes being imprisoned in Toledo. Finally, in 1580, King Philip II resolved the conflict

and allowed Teresa to continue her work. Exhausted from extensive traveling to set up new convents, she died two years later at the age of sixty-seven. In 1614, she was beatified St. Teresa of Avila by Pope Paul V.

Teresa's profound Dissolution had accelerated the alchemy of her soul to such an extent that she was completely flooded with divine spirit. In the words of the Emerald Tablet, the vehicle of that spirit and the carrier of the Word of God is the wind, and harnessing the transcendent power of the Air element is the topic we will examine next.

[1](#) From Zbigniew Szdto, *Water Which Does Not Wet the Hands: The Alchemy of Michael Sendivogius* (Warsaw: Polish Academy of Sciences, 1994).

[2](#) From Dennis William Hauck, *Captain Quirk* (New York: Pinnacle Books/Kensington Publishing, 1995) and *William Shatner: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Performing Arts Series, 1994).

[3](#) From "Mr. Tambourine Man" by Bob Dylan as recorded by William Shatner on the album *The Transformed Man* (Los Angeles, California: Decca Records, 1968).

[4](#) There are also astrological references to a Black Sun, similar to our notion of hell and purgatory, and to a White Moon, which is the repository of souls after death known as heaven in most religions. Such references are just another example of the inherent enantiomorphic nature of these powerful symbols.

[5](#) From the autobiography of Teresa de Cepeda written in 1562 and published in 1611 as *The Life of the Mother Teresa of Jesus*. Her books *The Way to Perfection* (1568), *Exclamations of the Soul to God* (1569), and *The Interior Castle* (1577) describe the progress of the soul as it moves toward God. Works on her life include Victoria Lincoln, *Teresa, a Woman* (New York: Paragon House, 1987) and Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).



Chapter 6

THE WIND CARRIES IT IN ITS BELLY

Air: The Breath of God

“Its father is the Sun; its mother the Moon,” says the third rubric. “The Wind carries it in its belly.” The alchemists took the words of the Emerald Tablet literally and saw the archetypal Sun and Moon as the father and mother of everything. They called this mystical coming together of the solar One Mind with the lunar One Thing the “Marriage of the Sun and Moon.” Seen in this way, the Sun and Moon are the parents of all things on all levels, but it is the Wind which carries their child to term. The child from the Marriage of the Sun and Moon, full of unlimited adaptability and potential, is the First Matter just starting to take form. Indeed, the birth of the First Matter from the heavenly marriage is a subtle miracle which relies on the primordial breath of God for its survival. But no matter on what level we observe it, the Wind is a symbol for that invigorating breath of fresh air and higher consciousness so necessary for the creation of something totally new.

Both the Bible and the Koran equate this spirit with the Wind. In fact, in Hebrew, Arabic, and Greek, the word for wind means both “breath” and “spirit.” Thus the Wind carries the cosmic breath of God, the great spirit who at the beginning of the world “moved upon the face of the waters” bringing order to the watery world and life to Adam. In the New Testament (John 3:8), we find a description of the Wind that captures its archetypal nature: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

In most religions, when the godhead takes form, it is either as a fiery light or as a wind, be it gentle breeze or frightful gale. Early Hindu texts state that wind came before light and originated from the empty space created by the longing of the first spirit, and in later Hindu traditions, Wind is the cosmic

breath and Word of the god of creation. In Jewish legends, Wind and Water were not created but were present from the beginning of time and represent the eternal presence of the One Mind and the One Thing. In Islamic belief, the Wind supports the first waters which bore the Throne of God, which is a classic symbol of the One Thing. Heaven rises up from the watery vapors and carries the divine throne up with it to create the Above and the Below. According to ancient Syrian texts, the world was created by the “dark wind that mated with itself ” as it hovered over the primeval chaos. In the Zoroastrian religion of ancient Persia, the spirit of the Wind was a fifteen-year-old boy who controlled the primordial waters and gave life to living things. In Egypt, the god Amen was the source of the cool north wind that blew over the desert at night, and the Sumerians worshipped a supreme god whose name literally meant “a puff of wind.” Druid priests also worshipped the wind and reportedly harnessed its powers to drive away invaders from landing on the shores of England.

The same Islamic texts that state the Wind supports the Throne of God say the Wind is composed of clouds, air, and countless invisible wings. It is through those “countless wings” that most of us know the Wind. Though invisible, the wind can produce violent and dramatic effects and is an unpredictable, powerful force which can only be reckoned with when it is active. The howling wind carries forces that threaten the status quo, causing thunderstorms, torna-does, and hurricanes that are outside man’s control. Yet without the element of Air that makes up the winds, we all suffocate in a few minutes.



The Wind carries the One Thing in its belly. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfurt 1617)

Air is the archetypal element of the Wind, and, like the Wind, has always been associated with spiritual forces. Gaston Bachelard called the element of Air “the psychic growth hormone,” whose contrary rising and falling movements are the basis for all transformational psychology. Stagnant personalities need Air, and in this sense, Air is the life force itself, the primordial *chi* in Taoist philosophy. The alchemical operation corresponding to Air and the Wind is Separation, which is seen as the birth of the child from the Marriage of the Sun and Moon. In the Great Work, Separation is the

removal of the practicing alchemist from the concerns of ordinary reality, so he or she can truly discern what is of value in the experiment. It must occur at the proper moment or all is lost. We will examine the process of Separation in more detail in chapter 13, “Separation: Identifying Essences.”

For now, we are going to look at how Separation works on the personal level. Psychologically, if we do not reject old habits and beliefs when confronted with the possibility of a better way of being, we end up imprisoned by a tyrannical ego complex that will perpetuate any illusion just to keep control. Sometimes the more talented we are and the more we have going for us, the harder it is to break away. A good example of that is a popular musician, who gave up everything to find his essence.

The Separation of Steven Georgiou

Steven Georgiou was born in 1948 to a Greek father and Swedish mother living in England. Unfortunately, the boy’s parents never got along, and it was only working in their restaurant in central London that kept the family together. A handsome, shy lad, Steven used the long hours he spent washing dishes to think up lyrics to songs, and by the time he was eighteen, he was bringing in more money in a single evening as a pop singer than his parents made in a month from their restaurant. However, the rock ’n’ roll lifestyle soon took its toll, and Steven, then known as “Cat Stevens,” became exhausted and, in his weakened condition, contracted tuberculosis. At the age of nineteen, he suffered a collapsed lung and other complications that required a three-month-long stay in the hospital. During the year he spent recuperating, Cat Stevens completely changed his style and starting composing songs like “Morning Has Broken,” “Wild World,” and “Peace Train” that were full of depth and maturity. His stage presence turned subdued and reticent, and he changed from a pop singer into the world’s leading composer of ballads.

“By the time he was twenty-two,” commented one record executive, “he had enough money and enough women, and it looked like the rest of his life was going to be an anticlimax.” But the women and the money became the

forces behind Steven's Calcination. He had two love affairs that he said tore him to pieces. He fell in love with actress Pattie D'Arbanville only to lose her to Mick Jagger, and then had a tumultuous affair with singer Carly Simon that ended when she broke it off. He also got into bitter arguments with his recording companies over contracts and publicity.

The beginning of Steven's Dissolution was signaled by strange, recurring dreams that he could not comprehend. In one dream, he was on a tour and missed Christmas, so he turned back time seven days and went shopping for presents for his relatives. He found himself in a town divided by a beautiful river but every way he turned there was a road that led to certain death. He took one road and ended up facing a doorway to death; in front of the door was a judge sitting on a high bench. Unless he was able to do something exceptionally entertaining for the judge, he would have to go through death's door. He could not think of anything to do, but one of his aunts appeared from nowhere with an electric tea kettle, which she took before the judge and plugged in. When it started boiling, she opened her mouth wide and blew out a giant cloud of steam. Everyone applauded, and the judge let Steven go home with his aunt. His dream symbolized the growing conflict within the young artist to either please the world or be true to himself. In truth, Steven's salvation was through death's door, which represented the death of the false ego on which he had based his fame. Other recurring dream images—such as being rejected, falling apart, or being cut to pieces—he included in the lyrics to his songs.

Another theme that made it into his music was UFOs, symbols that represented the early stages of his Separation, in which redeemed elements of his soul started surfacing. Images of flying saucers and alien surveillance were part of "Moonshadow," "Longer Boats," "Freezing Steel," and several other songs. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1972, he defended his beliefs: "The flying saucers aren't any indication of going crazy. I believe they exist. I had an experience once while I was lying in bed. I saw this flying saucer shoot across the sky and stop over me. And it sucked me up into it. When it put me down, I shot up in bed. I know it wasn't a dream; it didn't feel like a dream. It was real. I know it was real."

The circular images of psychological integration were surfacing in all phases of Steven's life. He wrote and drew pictures for a children's book entitled *The Boy Who Looked at the Moon*, in which the moon falls out of the

sky to earth. The moon turns out to be a flat disc, which accompanies Teaser (from his *Teaser and the Firecat* album) into a variety of weird adventures. Steven's *Buddha and the Chocolate Box* album contained tracks called "Bad Penny," "Sun," and "Home in the Sky" that alluded to the wholeness and redemption for which he was searching. He also directed the cover artwork for his album *Catch Bull at Four*, which shows a huge circle in which an Oriental person is holding back the horns of a bull. The scene portrays one of the stages of enlightenment in Zen Buddhism. "*Catch Bull at Four* was a very big step," he tried to explain to an interviewer in 1973. "It's not something that I want to be taken lightly by myself. The Eighth [ultimate stage of enlightenment] is a complete circle, I think, containing nothing. By the time I reach it, I'll probably have stopped making records."¹

Those prophetic words would come true just four years later when, in 1977, Steven's Separation took its most blatant form. After selling nearly thirty-five million records, Cat Stevens announced to a stunned music world he would never again make another recording. He asked all distributors to stop selling his records, and he turned over his royalties to charity. Renouncing the "pride and ego" of his former life, he explained that he was converting to Islam because of the "purity of its discipline" and that he had changed his name to Yusuf Islam. Steven's new name means "Joseph Surrenders" and refers to a story in the Koran that has strong parallels to his own life. Joseph was sold into slavery at an early age and was guided only by prophetic dreams and visions; it was not until he committed his life to Allah that he regained the personal power and freedom he lost as a youth. Today, Yusuf Islam lives with his Muslim wife and five children in Great Britain, where he is a powerful force behind education for Islamic children and other worldwide humanitarian efforts. His decisive split with the world in which he grew rich and famous is a modern example of alchemical Separation, in which the initiate is forced to take an objective look at his life from the highest perspective and get rid of that which does not serve the deeper purpose of his existence.

Earth: Its Nurse

Once alchemical Separation, or the spiritual, virgin birth, has taken place, the spiritual child must be raised to perfection. That is the purpose of the concept of Mother Earth in all the myths of creation. The Greek Gaia, Roman Tellus, German Nerthus, and Celtic Tailtiu were all goddesses representing the divine fertility and nurturing powers of earth. Tellus was often portrayed holding the cornucopia—the horn-of-plenty—which provided all living things with sustenance. In some Rosicrucian texts, the First Matter is referred to as the Telesma, the self-perfecting cornucopia of the goddess Tellus.

In all these myths, the proper attitude of human beings to the earth was always considered to be one of reverence and partnership. The very word “humility” comes from “humus,” meaning earth or soil, and many early agricultural societies believed the earth was a living presence and considered planting activities such as plowing a sexual act. Earthquakes and volcanic upheavals were viewed as the planet’s effort to shake off unwelcome human advances. In this view, Mother Earth refuses to give up her children permanently, and so we—who are made of clay and dirt—return to her womb when we die and are buried.

The mysterious connection between mankind and the planet was celebrated in ancient cults of initiation, in the Old Ways of the Wiccan tradition, and in the religious practices of native peoples. In their view, the earth is a microcosm of the universe in which there exists an Above, represented by the spiritual environments of mountaintops and waterfalls where the One Mind dwells, and a Below, represented by valleys, holes, caves, and underworld regions. The latter is the realm of the unrealized powers where the One Thing accumulates. Between the two is the manifest world. Native American shamans also speak of power spots and vortexes of psychic energy at certain locations. When the seeker achieves the proper frame of mind at these sacred places, he or she shares in the power of the One Thing that resides there.

Earth is also one of the four archetypal elements of alchemy and represents any solid matter, including rocks and minerals, plants and animals. Earth always requires an act of creation, an embodiment of the Word, which is how the divine spark is trapped within the matrix of matter as part of its origin. In many creation myths, man is created from dirt or clay when God breathes the breath of life into him; in this way the divine spark is embedded within man as his soul. In other words, the full potential of the gods as

archetypes can be fully realized only when they take physical form, and the Earth element signifies that solidification of higher spiritual principles. That is the meaning of the concluding section of the third rubric: “It is the Origin of all, the consecration of the Universe. Its inherent Strength is perfected, if it is turned into Earth.”

The alchemical operation corresponding to the Earth element is Conjunction, because all matter results from some sort of conjoining, or “coming together,” of the creative and receptive forces. Whether those forces are called the One Mind and the One Thing, Form and Matter, Sun and Moon, Fire and Water, Sulfur and Mercury, spirit and soul, male and female, yang and yin, or just plain positive and negative, their union serves to bring something new into reality, a third thing that incorporates the attributes of its parents. That is why the alchemists thought of Conjunction in overtly sexual terms and portrayed it as intercourse by the king and queen, sometimes even by a son with his mother or a brother with his sister, and often underwater or in an octagonal font. The alchemists referred to the gross melding of opposites that occurred in Conjunction as the *Monstrum Hermaphroditus* (Malformed Hermaphrodite), which must be strengthened and purified in ensuing operations to survive. These intense images invoked the primal nature of the archetypal copulation that alchemists believed occurred between the opposing forces of Sulfur and Mercury in the bowels of the earth that produced all the metals, including the noblest of all, gold.



The nurse of the One Thing is the Earth. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfurt 1617)

Psychologically, this marriage of the powers of the Sun and Moon, the union of solar consciousness with lunar subconscious, creates a new state of consciousness the alchemists named the Lesser Stone. In the final three operations of alchemy, the Lesser Stone becomes the Greater, or Philosopher's, Stone—a permanent state of enlightened consciousness. From an individual's viewpoint, Conjunction is the birth of a new reality through the union of thought and action. Sometimes at this stage, the crucial interaction is with another person, who at first seems totally opposite, but

who gradually guides us into a completely new way of looking at things. Among alchemists, one of the most fruitful of these spiritual alliances occurred between two remarkable and completely different men.

The Conjunction of Edward Kelly

At first glance, the life of Edward Kelly does not seem very exemplary. Born in 1555 in Worcester, England, the scruffy lad took up the profession of lawyer, though the details of his scholastic background remain sketchy. It is known that he made more a practice of forgery than of law and was arrested in Lancaster for falsifying deeds. As punishment, both his ears were lopped off, and that is how the Calcination of Edward Kelly began. Humiliated and disgraced, he fled north to Wales, where he changed his name and took up lodging at a remote inn. The innkeeper apparently took pity on the wretched man, for he treated him fairly and sought out his conversation. When he realized Kelly was an educated man, he brought out an old, weathered manuscript that had been found in a desecrated tomb at the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey. Two local men had broken into the tomb seeking valuables, but they found only the large book lying in the coffin and two small ivory vials, one attached to the corpse's mouth and the other to its forehead. The grave robbers traded the seemingly worthless items to the innkeeper for a skin of wine.

Since Kelly was able to read Latin, he discovered that the book was a work on the Hermetic arts, and when he opened the vials, he found that one contained a white powder and the other a strange red powder that seemed to glow. Intrigued, he offered a pound sterling for the lot, and the innkeeper, eager to rid himself of the relics, promptly agreed.

Kelly took the items to his room and spent the next few months trying to decipher the manuscript. The task proved daunting and he made little progress, though the eerie drawings in the book seemed to activate unconscious forces within Kelly, and he started having dreams full of alchemical symbols. The mysterious manuscript had become the catalyst of Kelly's Dissolution, a process that greatly sharpened his intuitive insight.

Gradually, Kelly discovered that the author of the book was St. Dunstan, a Christian alchemist and martyr. The last Abbot of Glastonbury, Dunstan was hanged by King Henry VIII for his allegiance to the Pope. Kelly found out that the abbot's book contained secret formulae based on the Emerald Tablet and other teachings of Hermes Trismegistus. Beyond that, the text and images were indecipherable, though Kelly instinctively felt the book contained marvelous truths.

In an act of Separation, Kelly picked up what was left of his life and decided to dedicate all his efforts to solving the mysteries contained in Dunstan's book. He soon forgot his own problems and took the manuscript to London to show it to Dr. John Dee, an acquaintance more knowledgeable in such things. Dee, a widely regarded mathematician and esoteric scholar, was an intense genius who entered Cambridge at the age of fifteen and disciplined himself to sleep only four hours a day so he could devote more time to studying mythology and alchemy.

When Kelly showed the manuscript and powders to Dee, the good doctor immediately recognized their value. Despite their opposing characters and lifestyles, Kelly and Dee agreed to collaborate on proving the manuscript's contents. In December 1579, using the two mysterious powders and following the instructions in Dunstan's book, the two men successfully transmuted "almost ten ounces of silver from twenty ounces of lead and from the same quantity of tin no less than ten ounces of pure gold." They continued experimenting and had many failures as well more successes. The ephemeral process, Dee wrote later, was one that involved not only a knowledge of chemistry but also demanded metaphysical changes in the two alchemists themselves. In fact, the two men even held seances and claimed to have conjured up the spirit of Apollonius of Tyana. They also used the Pattern in the Emerald Tablet to help them in their efforts. Dee swore that he would never use this spiritual knowledge to enrich himself but would instead use it to find the secret of the Philosopher's Stone for all mankind.

In June 1583, the British government issued an attachment on Kelly's possessions that accused him of illegally minting gold coins. The following September, the authorities issued a similar decree against John Dee and immediately seized his entire library and locked up all his property and possessions. Fortunately, Kelly and Dee, with their wives and Dee's children, had just weeks before sailed for Cracow, Poland, in the company of a Polish

nobleman. It is said that they repaid their benefactor with alchemical gold once they reached his homeland.

Two years later, Kelly and Dee moved to Prague, then considered the world center for alchemy. Dee preferred to work privately, but Kelly openly demonstrated the art of making gold, which was witnessed by dozens of reputable people. In the house of the physician to Emperor Rudolf II, Kelly transmuted a pound of mercury into fine gold in a process that left a small ruby at the bottom of the crucible.

At the court of former Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II, he demonstrated his power of projection to the German nobles and was promptly rewarded with knighthood. However, the greedy Maximilian decided to place his “living philosophical treasure” under house arrest and force him to fill the state coffers with gold. When Kelly could not keep up with the demand, he was thrown into a dungeon. Realizing his dire predicament, Kelly summoned John Dee and the two men worked together to satisfy the emperor, but the conditions were deplorable and Kelly ended up murdering one of their abusive guards. Kelly was remanded to the dungeon, though Dr. Dee was set free to return to England.

In 1590, Dee was granted an audience with Queen Elizabeth in which he pleaded for her intervention on behalf of his friend. After the Queen visited Dee in his house, where he demonstrated his powers of transmutation, she granted him a license in alchemy and began diplomatic efforts to get Kelly released. Dee was given a castle in Wales and in 1596 was made warden of Manchester College, where he moved with his family. He died there in 1608 at the age of eighty. The Queen had declared Edward Kelly her subject and demanded his return to England; however, Emperor Maximilian still believed in the man’s ability to make gold and refused to release him. Confined to his cell, Kelly wrote a book on the Philosopher’s Stone, which he said could not be found in books or laboratories but only within the alchemist himself, using not common chemicals but the “hidden Sulfur and Mercury.” Tragically, in the year 1597, Kelly died when he fell from a rope while trying to escape. Among his writings was found a suitable epitaph: “I venture to hope that my life and character will so become known to posterity that I may be counted among those who have suffered much for the sake of truth.”

It was indeed a remarkable life. At the lowest point in his career, Edward Kelly found new direction in an esoteric discipline that would lead to his

redemption; and his collaboration with John Dee, contrary to one another as they were, turned out to be one of most fruitful in the long history of alchemy.²

Both individually and taken together, the lives of Edward Kelly and John Dee demonstrate the power of Conjunction—the coming together of opposites and constellation of new beliefs that change our personalities at the deepest levels and provide us with unexpected inner strength and confidence to carry on. We will confront the profound powers of Conjunction in chapter 14 (“Conjunction: Creating the Overself”). In the meantime, the process of Conjunction has brought us to a new level on the alchemical ladder, where we enter the realm beyond the physical and embark on the final three operations that will bring about the ultimate Coagulation of spirit.

¹ From an interview with Michael Watts entitled “The Poets: Cat Stevens” published in *The Melody Maker File* (London: IPC Specialist and Professional Press Ltd. 1973). More information on the musician’s life can be found in Chris Charlesworth, *Cat Stevens* (Los Angeles: Proteus Publishing Co., 1985).

² Until 1582, Edward Kelly used the alias “Edward Talbot,” not the other way around, as some sources insist. It has recently been discovered that Edward also had a brother named Thomas Kelly. More about the work of Dr. Dee is contained in Gordon James, *The Secrets of John Dee* (Edmonds, Washington: Holmes Publishing Group, 1995); Nicholas Chulee, *John Dee’s Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 1989); and Geoffrey James, *The Enochian Magic of Dr. John Dee* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn, 1998).



Chapter 7 SEPARATE THE EARTH FROM FIRE

The Power of the True Imagination

With the fourth rubric of the Emerald Tablet, we begin to work with the powers of the Above. However, the Above in Hermetic terms is not the common Western idea of heaven, where we pass through pearly gates to be greeted by angels floating on billowy clouds with a bearded father-figure sitting on a massive throne. The Above is the abode of the One Mind, the realm of divine will and thought. The fourth rubric, which some have dubbed the “Pyramid Rubric,” tells us how to get there. It is the most mystical section of the Emerald Tablet:

*Separate the Earth from Fire,
the Subtle from the Gross,
gently and with great Ingenuity.
It rises from Earth to Heaven
and descends again to Earth,
thereby combining within Itself
the powers of both the Above and the Below.¹*

This rubric presents a difficult transition for many people. As civilized adults, we have all gone through the contemporary rites of passage, having long surrendered our deep psychological connection with nature. Moreover, most of us have gotten beyond the anthropomorphic notions of heaven that society asks us to exchange for our original awareness and have moved on toward a materialistic view of an impassive, clockwork universe. By severing our ties with the Above in this way, we have lost sight of how amazingly close at hand the divine is and how much we participate in its activities every day. The ancients knew exactly what the powers from the Above were like because they experienced them directly within themselves.

It has been postulated that 5,000 or so years ago mankind lived in

unconscious communion with the gods and followed divine “voices” in times of novel or stressful situations. Included in the Hermetic tradition attributed to Egypt is a series of induction techniques used to “imprison spirits” in lifeless statues to make them speak and prophesize, and nearly every ancient land had its own set of “mysteries” that included divine oracles. The ancients remembered what it was like before full consciousness dawned in man and believed that the mental world of thought and imagination was every bit as real as the physical world in which they found themselves. With the breakdown of the divine connection, the One Mind in man slowly split into the duality of rational consciousness, although the archaic ability to exist in both realms is said to have survived in a few genuine psychics and prophets. Our species’ memory of that era is passed down in religious myths that describe mankind living in the presence of God or in an earthly paradise such as the Garden of Eden.²

In the modern Garden of Mammon, we have lost all respect for subjective thought, which is the only source of our connection with the powers in the Above. According to the Doctrine of Correspondences in the Emerald Tablet, the structure and attributes of the macrocosm of the Above are repeated in the microcosm of the Below and vice versa. The One Mind is reflected in our individual minds, and the loss of the esteem with which we hold our own thoughts has resulted in the loss of connection in each of us with the higher One Mind. Perhaps our thoughts have lost their intrinsic value because there are simply too many of them floating around and because nobody seems to care whether anyone’s thoughts are inherently true or not. In the modern era of marketing, megaentertainment, media politics, and competitive science, what matters is not the inherent truthfulness of an idea but how innovative or lucrative it is—how much it can “bring in.” In this commercialized arena for thoughts, it is not surprising that most of us view our internal mental world as inferior to outside reality. We tend to think that imagination is the same as fantasy, that dreams are just image soup, that visions are psychotic, that myths and legends are just tall tales, and that our thoughts have no effect on reality. Most of us really believe that the best use that can be made of the power of thinking is to plot, gain the upper hand, make more money, garner more esteem, or get an edge over someone else in the rat race.

Yet this uninspired existence is not entirely our fault. We assimilate our

materialistic values from a technological society that has deliberately severed its ties with the Above. The death knoll for God started long before *Time* magazine proclaimed it on its cover: we killed God when we killed matter with the demise of alchemy in the eighteenth century. Most of us live today with the outdated Newtonian view of the universe that matter is composed of a bunch of billiard-ball atoms. It is this gross, oversimplified view of reality that has infiltrated the minds of our government officials, business managers, primary educators, and many so-called religious leaders. Those who *do* believe in God tell us we have to wait to get through the gates of heaven to be in his presence, though there are a lot of scalpers hanging around those pearly gates ready to sell us tickets to get in. For most of us, our deepest yearning—that of experiencing the divine—must be postponed. In this way are we programmed to commit spiritual suicide early in life in order to quench our soul’s sincerest desire. We either grow up living the Great Lie or end up prematurely destroying the “physical container” that holds us back so we can catch the next spaceship to heaven on the tail of a comet. Our lack of confidence in our own subjective reality has led us to believe that we must join a cult or church to experience divine truth.

Surprisingly, it is only at the fringes of modern culture where the truly divine can still be found. For the most part, organized religions and government policies come between man and the divine, but for aborigines, Native Americans, and indigenous people around the world, God is still close by, his Signature within matter—in nature itself. The Australian aborigines, the oldest continuously existing society on earth, believe that, in a state of consciousness known as “Dream Time,” they can enter into matter (rocks, trees, animals) and know its divine essence. They describe that essence as One Thing for all matter, a place where all possibilities exist in an eternal now called “Everywhen.” Dream Time is not associated with sleep but rather is induced by rituals that include chanting, drumming, and dancing to clear the mind and allow deep concentration. By focusing awareness on material objects and finding the “Inbetween”—a crack in reality through which their minds can flow—they enter another place where everything is known and matter exists in a state of complete potentiality. This is what the Emerald Tablet refers to as the Above, the higher source that most of us have been taught to ignore.

At the other end of the intellectual spectrum, scientists working in

quantum mechanics and astrophysics are forced to confront the divine presence concealed in matter. Physicists are slowly realizing that at both ends of the universe, from the smallest atom to the largest galaxy, consciousness (the One Mind of the Emerald Tablet) plays a fundamental role in creating reality. “The stream of knowledge,” summarized astronomer Sir James Jeans, “is heading toward a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought rather to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter.”

The Elements in Heaven

The alchemists believed that just as there are elements that make up physical reality in the Below, so must there be similar elements in the Above through which the godhead operates. They saw these heavenly elements as universal principles, a trinity of forces acting on everything. Using the same intuitive processes that proved to them there existed four archetypal elements in the Below, so did they know that there were three basic forces in the Above. It is an idea that goes back to the roots of alchemy, as we can see from this section from the *Chaldean Oracles*, written by the monotheistic Persian mystic Zoroaster around 600 B.C.E.: “For the Mind of the Father said that all things should be cut into Three; whose Will assented, and then all things were so divided. For the Mind of the eternal Father spoke into three parts, governing all things by Mind. And there appeared within the One Thing the triad, and all things flowed forth from the Mind of the Father in the form of the triad, being preexistent—not the first essence but that quality whereby all things are measured—from the Fountain of Fountains and within the matrix containing all.”

To these three original celestial elements the alchemists assigned the names of chemical substances that exhibited similar characteristics. They called the Father or masculine principle Sulfur; to the Son or androgynous principle they gave the name Mercury; and the Mother or feminine principle

within matter they called Salt. Just as the elements of the Below partake of the characteristics of Earth in their manifestation, so do the elements of the Above share the spiritizing element of Air. Thus airy (or ethereal) Fire corresponds to Sulfur; airy Water corresponds to Mercury; and airy Earth corresponds to Salt. Most of us are already familiar with these three archetypal forces from the Above, since they recur throughout the world's religions. In Christianity, they are the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In Taoism, they are forces of Heaven, Man, and Earth. Similarly, Theosophists speak of the Three Supernals, Buddhists have their Triple Jewel, and Hindus have the Trimurti. The ancient *Upanishads* refer to the expression of the three principles within man as the Causal, Subtle, and Gross bodies. Historians see them played out in the human drama as Will, Providence, and Destiny.

In most generalized terms, we are talking about the universal forces of energy, consciousness, and matter. The great traditionalist philosopher Rene Guenon, who undertook an in-depth study of the trinity of celestial elements, believed they were forces that were present in any act of manifestation. He referred to the active principle the alchemists called Sulfur as “Essence,” the passive principle of Salt as “Substance,” and the reconciling principle of Mercury as the “Mediator.” Guenon acknowledged the universal truths revealed in the Emerald Tablet and saw in its formula a path to spiritual enlightenment.

“Heaven is his father, Earth his mother,” Guenon wrote in *The Great Triad* (Cambridge, England: Quinta Essentia, 1991). “So reads the formula—always exactly the same wherever it occurs, regardless of time or place—that defines the nature of the relationship between Man and the other two terms of the Great Triad by describing him as the Son of Heaven and Earth. The very fact that it is an initiatic formula is itself a clear indication that, if we are to understand it in its fullest sense, it must not just be thought of as referring to the ordinary man who is the product of present world conditions, but as describing the ‘true man’ all of whose possibilities the initiate is called upon to realize within himself.”

As the “Son of Heaven and Earth,” the initiate has inside himself not only the four earthly elements but also the three heavenly ones, which is why the ancients viewed the individual as a microcosm of the whole universe. The same forces that shaped the cosmos are present in man. This is the meaning

of the Doctrine of Correspondences and the whole impetus for spiritual alchemy. No matter how far man has fallen from grace, no matter how tightly shackled to the chains of physicality he has allowed himself to become, there is hope for him because he has all the elements necessary to set himself free. All he has to do is purify the earthly elements in his soul and personality and activate the heavenly elements of his indwelling spirit. This is the Great Work—to dissolve all that is inferior within us and coagulate all that is superior. In other words, we have to transmute the very elements of which we are made.



An alchemist in solitary meditation works to transmute the elements within. (Daniel Mylius, Philosophia Reformata, Frankfurt 1622)

The first of these symbolic higher elements, Sulfur, was known to the ancients as brimstone (“burning stone”), and it was widely used for medicinal

purposes. Pure sulfur is a golden powder, but if ignited, it burns with a biting odor and leaves behind a red plastic mass. Alchemists often referred to it simply as the King or the Lion, and gave it active, masculine characteristics. They associated sulfur with the Sun, the energy and spirit of nature. The second heavenly element, Mercury, was called quicksilver (“living silver”), and it could be found in nature, weeping through cracks in certain rocks or accumulated in puddles in mountain grottos. By roasting rocks of cinnabar (mercury sulfide) over an open fire, the glistening metal expands and oozes out tiny openings in the rocks, dripping down into the ashes where it can be later collected.

Mercury is an amazing substance, full of contradictory characteristics, which is why the alchemists referred to it as the *Rebis* (something double natured). It is the only metal that is liquid at room temperature, yet it forms solid amalgams when mixed with other metals. It also has the ability to dissolve gold and is still used today to mine the precious metal. Mercury is highly volatile and, when heated in a flask, it collects as a white powder at the neck of the flask while red crystals form below. The white powder is one of the deadliest poisons known and has claimed the lives of many unsuspecting alchemists. On the other hand, the red crystals are highly therapeutic and are used in a variety of pharmaceutical applications, the most common of which is the antiseptic mercurochrome. The Egyptians prepared the red healing crystals by heating a mixture of mercury and acid of saltpeter (nitric acid). They found the chemical reaction especially fascinating since it replayed the original pattern of creation. As the mixture is heated, a thick red vapor forms and large red crystals precipitate to the bottom of the container. This simultaneous separation into the Above and Below signified that mercury contained the esoteric elements of Air and Water present at the beginning of time. If we reproduce the experiment, it is easy to see how the Egyptian alchemists interpreted it according to the Emerald Tablet. The external Fire (the divine Mind or Will) drives the reaction, and the spiritualized Air carries the Word (Thought) of God that acts upon the chaotic Waters (the One Thing) to create Earth, which is the precipitated matter that suddenly appears out of nowhere.

Therefore, Mercury has the ability to participate in all states of matter and serve as the agent of transformation between them. This was an astonishing chemical discovery that, by the Doctrine of Correspondences, gave the

ancient alchemists hope for their own salvation. Just think of it! On all levels of creation there existed an intermediary principle that connected the Above with the Below and vice versa. Even in the heavens, the planet Mercury is the swiftest heavenly body, sometimes apparently reversing directions in retrograde motion, and always difficult to observe except during the changing seasons as it seems to dart between the sun and the other planets disseminating the divine Word. The concealed wonder of the element of Mercury was that it carried the Word of God scattered throughout the universe—the *Logos Spermatikos*—whose flowing, transmutative power operated the Above and Below and was mirrored in the fluency of the spoken word among humans. However it is expressed, the Mercury archetype has the ability to participate in all realms and serve as the agent of transformation between them.

The Emerald Tablet tells us that the inherent strength of the One Thing is perfected if it is turned into Earth, yet the term the alchemists used to describe this ultimate exaltation of matter was the very common name of “Salt,” the last and most important of the celestial or archetypal elements. The birth of common salt (sodium chloride) usually takes place from the union of Fire and Water in the heating and evaporation of sea water. To Egyptian alchemists, sodium symbolized the common principle in all salts and the formation of bodies in general. The chemical symbol for sodium, Na, is from the Arabic word *Natron* for the white salts that accumulate on dry lake beds. The world’s oldest known deposits are in Egypt where it was used to embalm mummies. Furthermore, the reabsorption of salt crystals to become part of a body of water is symbolic of the assumption of the individual soul into the One Thing, the individual mind into the One Mind. For alchemists of all eras, Salt carried profound symbolic meaning and was ultimately the most important of all the celestial elements.

According to the French metaphysician Rene Alleau, there are five stages in the evolution of matter. First is the chaotic One Thing, the prior elements which contain the inherent possibilities of the cosmos. Next comes the First Matter, the elementary organization of the inherent possibilities, which Alleau saw as equivalent to the human unconscious or instinctual mind. Third is Mercury, the first purification which releases feelings and imagination, as the female mental component dominates. Fourth is Sulfur, a more profound purification in which reason, thought, and the male mental component

dominates. The final stage is Salt, the union of the male and female components which is the Quintessence of the Great Work. The ultimate Salt is the Philosopher's Stone, which represents transcendence and direct knowledge—matter made completely aware.³

Using the Secret Fire

The alchemists believed that the driving force behind the evolution of matter, the connection between mental and physical reality, was Fire. They spent an inordinate amount of time thinking and writing about fire and concluded that it existed on all levels of reality—from the grossest expression of the One Thing in ordinary matter to the most subtle and luminous One Mind. Generally, the alchemists were very secretive about discussing the grades of fire they used, but one practitioner wrote openly on the subject. He was a Benedictine monk by the name of Antoine-Joseph Pernety, who delineated four different types of Fire, from the grossest to the subtlest: Elementary, Secret, Central, and Celestial.

“The Elementary Fire, which is the fire of our stoves,” Pernety wrote in 1758, “is impure, thick and burning. This fire is sharp and corrosive, ill-smelling, and is known through the senses. It has for its abode the surface of the earth and our atmosphere and is destructive; it wounds the senses, it burns, it digests, concocts, and produces nothing. It is external [to the alchemist] and separating.” According to Pernety, the purest grade of fire was the white Celestial Fire, or the fiery power of God's Will. He described it thus: “The Celestial Fire is very pure, simple and not burning in itself. It has for its sphere the ethereal region, whence it makes itself known even to us. Celestial Fire shines without burning and is without color and odor, though it is sensibly exhaled. It is gentle and known only by its operations.”⁴

Between these two extremes of Elementary Fire and Celestial Fire, the alchemists postulated two other gradients. One was the Central Fire hidden within matter, which is God's Signature in matter, or the One Mind acting on the One Thing. According to Pernety: “The Celestial Fire passes into the nature of the Central Fire; it becomes internal, engendering in matter. Though

the Central Fire [within matter] is pure in itself, it is mixed and tempered. It engenders and enlightens sometimes without burning, and burns sometimes without giving any light. It is invisible and therefore known only by its qualities. The Central Fire is lodged in the center of matter; it is tenacious and innate in matter; it is digesting, maturing, neither warm nor burning to the touch.”



The seven operations of alchemy and the four grades of Fire needed to complete them. (Basil Valentine, Occulta Philosophia, Frankfurt 1603)

There is yet a fourth grade of Fire, and it was the primary Fire with which the spiritual alchemists worked. They called it their “Secret Fire,” and they went to great pains to disguise its true nature. What clues does Pernety give us? “The fire of the sun could not be this Secret Fire,” he teases. “It is interrupted, unequal, and does not penetrate. The fire of our stoves, which

hinders the union of the miscibles and consumes the bond of the constituent parts, could not be the one. The Central Fire, which is innate in matter, cannot be that Secret Fire so much praised, because the heat which engenders is internal and innate in matter, and that which corrupts is external and foreign to matter.” What Pernety is saying is that the Secret Fire is “external” to matter yet is somehow able to change it or cause its “corruption.”

So, the Secret Fire is outside matter. Could it be part of the consciousness or life force of the alchemist himself? Says Pernety: “This heat is very different within the generation of the individuals of the three kingdoms; the animal possesses it in a much higher degree than the plant.” Furthermore, he tells us, the identity of the Secret Fire was known and concealed ever since the invention of writing in the Thothian epoch. “In allegories and fables the philosophers have given to this Secret Fire the names sword, lance, arrows, javelin, etc. It is the Fire which Prometheus stole from heaven and which Vulcan employed to form the thunderbolts of Jupiter and the golden throne of Zeus.”

Now the true nature of the Secret Fire becomes clearer. Swords, arrows, and similar objects are symbolic of the power of thought and especially the ability to present higher truth courageously without regard to sentiment or social expectations. For instance, in the Book of Revelations, a two-edged sword emerges from the mouth of the Word, which is pictured as a face which beams like the Sun. So the Secret Fire is not the scorching blaze of consciousness experienced in Calcination but a warm, nourishing heat. It is the heavenly inspiration that burns steadily within a person. The Secret Fire is higher consciousness, the thoughts from Above that enlighten us. This is “thought” in its highest sense—equivalent to the god Thoth, who speaks only the true Word, which through intonation and vibration acts on matter to create new incarnations of Mind. To some extent, this divine power is shared by humans in the power of inspired thought and imagination.

How to Quicken Your Soul

The alchemists associated the Secret Fire with the process of

Fermentation, in which new life is brought to dead, decaying matter. This state of inspiration and living imagination is achieved by removing the “Earth” from the Fire of consciousness, by separating the subtle from the gross “gently and with great ingenuity.” This unassuming phrase has been translated in more ways than any other part of the tablet. Some versions interpret this as “act prudently with good judgment,” while others say it means “suavely using great skill.” However, the original Arabic and Latin words suggest that “gently” refers to a philosophical or mental task as opposed to a physical skill, while “ingenuity” is meant in the original sense of “inspired by genius” or “infused with spirit.” Therefore, the intended meaning is that we enter the quiet realm of mind in meditation and seek to connect with the greater mind or source of higher inspiration to quicken and transform our being. The alchemists thought of this process as a kind of fermentation, which is a biological reaction in which organic material is “spiritized.” To spiritize in alchemy is to introduce an outside energy or life force to a substance. Spiritization can take the form of an actual rising, such as that caused by the action of yeast in bread, or it can be expressed as the creation of alcoholic spirits, such as the production of wine from the grape juice. The curdling of milk by bacteria is another example. In all these types of fermentation, an outside life force has been introduced which excites, agitates, and transforms the original material. In fact, the word “ferment” is derived from the Latin *fervere*, which means to seethe or boil.

However, before fermentation can take place, another, less agree-able, process must occur. It is the natural precursor to fermentation: the black stage of putrefaction in which organic materials decompose through rotting and internal digestion. In spiritual terms, this is the Dark Night of the Soul. Whether through the natural calamities and disappointments of just being alive or through deliberate alchemical transformation, we all reach a point at which we have had enough and must surrender to outside forces. Putrefaction is the absolute suppression of ego, an indispensable requirement for moving into higher dimensions of consciousness. Putrefaction is often perceived as a dark depression in which the former ruling principle of the personality must die to make room for a higher identity. The alchemist must forbear during this uncomfortable phase of lost identity, while the base elements within transmute into nobler elements. What happens during the fertile blackness of Putrefaction is that the male solar energies are eclipsed by the lunar female

subconscious and expressed as moodiness or depression.



The soul is quickened in her grave. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfort 1617)

“So long as the black stage is manifest, the dark woman prevails,” notes Arnaldus de Villa Nova, author of *Ludus Puerorum (A Children’s Game, Frankfort, 1638)*, “and that is the first strength of our Stone.” Because releasing subtle feminine energies gives new power to the adept, the alchemists viewed Putrefaction as a kind of spiritual conception and eagerly looked in the milkish liquid that formed on blackened decaying matter for any signs of color, of new hope. “The philosophical Putrefaction is nothing

but the corruption or destruction of bodies,” says the *Rosarium*, “for as soon as one form has been destroyed, nature introduces another form in its stead which is both better and more subtle.” The blessed signal that putrefaction is over is known as the Peacock’s Tail, a rainbow display of brilliant colors that appears to float on the surface of the decaying matter like a peacock spreading its tail. For the practicing alchemist, it was the long-awaited indication that the divinely inspired process of Fermentation had begun. Psychologically, the Peacock’s Tail symbolizes the appearance of the True Imagination or inspiration during meditation.

The Fermentation of Jacob Boehme

The life of German mystic Jacob Boehme⁵ was one of constant Fermentation. Born in 1575 to Saxon peasants, the boy received only a rudimentary education before he was apprenticed to a shoemaker, though at an early age he began to show the qualities that would distinguish him. He was known as an introspective and imaginative lad totally lacking in ambition and worldly pride, “with a dreamy face and poetic nature,” who began having powerful visions at an early age. The boy also was said to speak to plants and animals, and, like Balinas, to know foreign languages without having studied them. Perhaps there were forces from the Above at work in his life since he was born. Once, while still working as an apprentice, Jacob insisted that an angelic stranger walked into the store, took his hand, and—calling him by name—told him to remain pious, for “the time is coming when the world shall marvel at you.” This stranger also told him to “have comfort and instruction through the misery, poverty, and persecution which are in store for you” because “God loves you and gives you his grace.” Shortly afterwards, Jacob came across some alchemy books and immediately recognized that the operations they described were spiritual in nature, and he started using chemical terms in a transliterated, spiritual sense.

As the source of alchemy, the Emerald Tablet contained all the steps necessary to unveil the One Thing, the Holy Ghost within the world, which Jacob believed to be the key to the whole Work. From his exalted viewpoint, he declared: “The Work is easy, the act simple. A boy of sixteen years might make it, but the wisdom therein is great, and it is the greatest mystery.” Such

comments and his strange behavior caused inevitable friction between Jacob and the practical apprentices with whom he labored. In 1594, he was dismissed from his apprenticeship before its completion. He returned to his home in Gorlitz, where he nonetheless opened a cobbler shop and soon married the daughter of a local tradesman.

Despite his bourgeois lifestyle, Jacob continued to have visions, and in 1598 he was “enveloped by a brilliant light” that lasted for several days. During that state, he became aware of the archetypal essences at the heart of all creation—what he called the “self-interpreting signatures” of all things. Two years later the experience repeated itself when he fell into a hypnotic trance while gazing at a shiny pewter dish. Again he saw the signatures that represented the thoughts of the mind of God in the manifest world. He called the One Thing, in which the thoughts of God took form, the Source-Ground. “The Source-Ground is the Great Mystery, the Chaos from which originates good and evil, light and darkness, life and death, joy and suffering, salvation and damnation. It is the ground of souls and angels and all eternal creatures, the ground of heaven and hell and the visible world, including all existing things, since everything comes from that one thing, the Source-Ground.”

Jacob’s visions became even clearer over the next decade. It was as if a secret school were continually in session inside him that perfected the quality of material he received. In one fifteen-minute revelation that occurred in 1610, he traveled to the Above and Below (what he called the Byss and the Abyss) and witnessed the generation of all things through the action of three forces emanating from the godhead. It was his supreme vision; after that, there seemed to be less of “him” and more of the divine in his mystical states, and he got to the point where he simply could not contain them. Feverishly, he started writing down his thoughts and produced his first manuscript, *Aurora, or Morning Redness in the Rising of the Sun*. Copies were circulated by his close friends, but a local pastor got hold of a copy and insisted that the town council forbid Jacob from writing any more “pretensions to theology.” For five years, Jacob obeyed the injunction and stuck to his trade, but the visions were unrelenting, and in 1619 he started putting them to paper again. He produced such voluminous and fascinating works that they were difficult to keep private, and pressure from the ecclesiastical authorities forced his exile from Saxony. He appealed to the electoral court at Dresden, where a panel of eminent theologians was assembled to examine him. Like the priests

and scholars who examined Balinas more than fifteen hundred years earlier, they were so impressed that they declared him beyond their power to judge. But, unlike Balinas, Jacob Boehme was at the end of his years when his godlike abilities were acknowledged.

In November 1624, Jacob suddenly became feverish at the home of a friend in Silesia, and, knowing he was about to die, asked to be transported back to Gorlitz. There, with his wife and four children around him, he entered an “ecstatic state” and took leave of them one by one. He kissed his wife goodbye and told her she would not survive long after him (which she did not), then said farewell to his four children. As he approached death, the loving gaze of his eldest son seemed to keep Jacob from severing the bonds, so he asked his son to turn around and look away. Immediately, Jacob Boehme let out one deep sigh and expired.

It has been said that the day Jacob Boehme opened an alchemy book was the day that the secrets of alchemy were irretrievably revealed to the world. The mystical boy knew instinctively that the Vessel of the Philosophers was the human body and their Stone the perfected human soul. He knew because he had already experienced within himself the primary operations of spiritual alchemy and was undergoing the Fermentation of images and mental content that would prepare him for the ultimate revelation of his own unique “signature,” the release of his purified essence, and the Coagulation of his own immortal Stone (see more on Coagulation in chapters 8 and 17).

“I have never desired to learn any sciences,” Jacob said of his life, “but from early youth I strove after the salvation of my soul, and thought how I might possess the kingdom of heaven. Finding within myself a powerful adversary, namely, the desires that belong to the flesh and blood, I began to fight a hard battle against my corrupted nature, and with the aid of God I made up my mind to overcome the inherited evil will, to break it, and to enter wholly into the love of God. I therefore then and there resolved to regard myself as one dead in my inherited form, until the spirit of God would take form in me, so that in and through Him I might conduct my life. Now while I was wrestling and battling [with the adversary within], a wonderful light arose within my soul. It was a light entirely foreign to my unruly nature, but in it I recognized the true nature of God and man, and the relation existing between them, a thing which before that I had never understood, and for which I would never have thought to seek.”

Although the physical alchemists struggled to pin down the technical details of Fermentation, its overwhelming spiritual power was obvious to all who experienced it. We will learn how to use this process to gain higher inspiration in chapter 15, “Fermentation: Fire in the Soul.” However, not everyone who has undergone Fermentation has understood the experience as well as Jacob Boehme, for the process introduces us to realities for which our society does not prepare us. It is the job of the next operation, Distillation, to purify those experiences so they do not overwhelm us, so we can assimilate the new world view and use it to guide us to the final step in alchemy.

1 The reason this seven-line rubric is called the “Pyramid Rubric” is that its esoteric structure resembles a pyramid. The processes described here are built upon the four elements revealed in the previous rubric, and each of those elements must be operated on in turn by the Three Forces from Above in order to perfect matter. The four elements make up the earthly, square base of the pyramid, and each of those is acted upon by the heavenly forces represented by the corresponding triangular side. Each element is thereby “raised” to the singular point at the apex of the pyramid, called the One-Point or golden capstone of the Egyptians. There, the four elements unite into a new fifth element, which is the Quintessence that becomes the Philosopher’s Stone in the seventh stage of alchemy.

2 This hypothesis is documented in Princeton psychologist Julian Jaynes’s *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976).

3 From Rene Alleau, *La Science des Symboles* (Paris: Editeur Université, 1976). Alleau also wrote an insightful study of alchemy entitled *Aspects de l’Alchimie* (Paris: Editeur Université, 1970).

4 Antoine-Joseph Pernety (1716-1796) was a Benedictine monk and highly regarded alchemist. The material in this section was written in 1758 and is taken from his *An Alchemical Treatise on the Great Art* (Boston: Occult Publishing Co., 1898; York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1995).

5 The sources for information in this section are Franz Hartman, *The Life and Doctrines of Jacob Boehme* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1891; Kila, Montana: Kessinger Publishing Co., 1992) and Arthur Edward Waite, *Alchemists Through the Ages* (Blauvelt, New York: Steiner Publications, 1970; Blauvelt, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1985). Of

the thirty books written by Boehme, the most influential are: *Aurora, oder Morgenroethe im Aufgang* (*Aurora, or Morning Redness in the Rising of the Sun*, 1612), *Das Klavis* (*The Key*, 1618), *Mysterium Magnum* (*The Great Mystery*, 1623), and *Von der Gnadenwahl* (*On the Election of Grace*, 1623).



Chapter 8

THE GREATEST FORCE OF ALL POWERS

Purification by the Rays of the Sun and Moon

Artists and creative people who seek inspiration on a daily basis know that the channel to the Above must be kept clear. When an artist is “in his element,” he is creating something new and wonderful that, surprisingly, is not originating from him but *through* him. True creativity requires opening up to the Above and bringing back something of the infinite possibilities that exist there. As the musician and composer Donovan once said, tapping into one’s creativity is a matter of “getting the human out of the way.” Distillation is the alchemical process for doing that.

“It rises from Earth to Heaven and descends again to Earth, thereby combining within Itself the powers of both the Above and the Below.” That is how the second half of the Pyramid Rubric describes Distillation. In chemical terms, this operation involves heating a mixture and condensing the resulting vapor to produce a more nearly pure substance. The purity is increased with each successive distillation. Psychologically, Distillation is the dematerialization of the psyche, as the alchemist sacrifices his earthly nature, which consists of his base emotions and ego identity. In its place, he seeks an infusion of divine perspective, what the alchemists saw as a circular process of gradual assimilation of the forces of the Above.

In describing Distillation, the Christian alchemist Bernardi Penotus remarked in *De Physici Lapidus Materia (Natural Philosophy of the Stone, Frankfort, 1600)*: “As to how the Son of Man is generated by the philosopher and the Fruit of the Virgin is produced, it is necessary that he be exalted from the earth and cleansed of all earthiness; then he rises as a whole into the air and is changed into spirit. Thus the word of the philosophers is fulfilled: He ascends from earth to heaven and puts on the power of the Above and the Below, and lays aside his earthly and uncleanly nature.” The “Son of Man”

referred to here is the Christ consciousness in all of us, the burning desire of our souls to experience union with pure spirit. In the spiritual sense, Distillation is the purification of soul as it approaches perfect spirit, the final cleansing before inseparable union. In the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Hermes emphasizes the importance of Distillation: “Our Secret Fire dissolves the Stone naturally and without violence and makes it dissolve back into Water. After a proportioned Digestion and Putrefaction, it is again dissolved by a nature wholly divine in the Distillation which is made by the rays of the Sun and Moon.”

Pseudo-Dionysius, a sixth-century heretic monk, described the state of meditation used in the process of Distillation. “In the exercise of mystical contemplation,” he advised, “leave behind the senses and the activities of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual so that you may arise, as far as you can, by unknowing, towards union with Him who transcends all being and all knowledge.” ¹ According to Pseudo-Dionysius, to reach that state requires that one be free of emotion and ego-centered thought, beyond even physical sensation, and to stay there requires “the unceasing and absolute renunciation of ourselves and all things.” However, because he believed that the union with the divine must take place in this life and not in the Hereafter, the church branded him a heretic.



The resurrected soul, as the eternal youth Mercury, wields the caduceus in victory over the forces of ego. (Basilius Valentinus, Grossen Stein der Uralten, Zerbst 1602)

“To purify the soul is to isolate her,” summarized the third-century Alexandrian philosopher Plotinus, “preventing her from attaching herself to other things and raise her from the things here below to intelligible entities; also to wean her from the body, for in that case she is no longer sufficiently attached to it to be enslaved to it, resembling a light which is not absorbed in the whirlwind of matter. To purify the soul is to hinder her from inclining towards lower things, or from representing their images to herself; it means annihilating the things from which she is thus separated, so that she is no longer choked.”

The Distillation of Raymond Lully

No matter how low we have fallen, the process of Distillation takes us to the highest level and purges us of ego and worldliness. An example of this spiritual process can be found in the life of the renowned alchemist Raymond Lully.² Born in 1235 to a wealthy family in Majorca, Spain, he rebuffed their attempts to get him to attend the university and became a popular poet instead. Leading the romantic life of a troubadour, Lully ended up a member of the royal court of Aragon. Always a handsome ladies' man, Lully could never resist the temptations of the flesh and constantly sought new liaisons among the bored and comely ladies of the Spanish court. His indiscretions were so frequent that King James II complained and suggested that Lully settle down and marry a lovely, wealthy woman who was seeking a husband. That he did, although it did not curb his appetite for other women. But Lully finally met his match in an extremely beautiful noblewoman who played a horrifying trick on him.

Though she was married, Lully openly flirted with the gorgeous woman and even followed her around on horseback. After being harassed for months, she agreed to meet him for a rendezvous, and Lully fantasized for days about the upcoming tryst. When the day finally arrived, he found her waiting patiently for him, and he approached her tenderly. Just as he was about to place a kiss on her pouting red lips, she ripped open her blouse to reveal an ulcerating and cancerous breast that gave off a gangrenous odor. As he turned away in revulsion, she cried out how much better it would have been for him to set his love on the Creator and win a more lasting prize. He ran from the scene, overcome by shame, his pride forever crushed.

Lully's humiliating Calcination experience forced him to face the futility of his materialistic existence, and the high-living courtesan soon renounced his decadent lifestyle. In 1265, he divided his estate among his family and moved to Mount Randa near Majorca to live the life of a hermit. During this period of deep introspection, Lully entered Dissolution and was overwhelmed by nightmares and religious visions that seemed to be directing him to the Arabic lands. During his Separation phase, Lully identified the purified essences being released in his soul and discovered a type of alchemy being practiced in Tunisia that shared many of the components of his dreams, so he taught himself Arabic and traveled to northern Africa, where he joined a Sufi sect and learned spiritual alchemy. This esoteric training completed his

personal Conjunction of soul and spirit.

Lully's Fermentation took place in 1272, when he returned to Mount Randa and entered a seven-month period of constant prayer and meditation. One visitor to his tiny hut on the mountain described Lully's behavior as "always absorbed in prayer and conversing continually with angels whose consolations he received, and which the soul can indeed realize, but which the lips cannot worthily describe." Then one day, Lully's whole being was flooded with a warm light, and he had a vision much like the Revelation of Hermes. Lully beheld the vertical axis of reality and traveled to the Above and the Below. He saw that all things emanate from the One Mind through divine thought finding expression in matter. As his Distillation of the experience began, Lully attempted to translate his otherworldly experience into words so he could understand it. He named the divine thoughts or archetypal forms that he experienced the "Dignities of God," which were remarkably similar to the divine Signatures of Jacob Boehme. Like Boehme, Lully believed they were based on a trinity of forces that were the causes of all phenomena.

As his Distillation continued, Lully expanded his idea of the Dignities of God to include alchemical and Christian concepts and eventually adopted the system of Divine Names from the Cabala. He invented a method that used freely rotating concentric disks on which were imprinted all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. By rotating the disks into various positions, he tried to generate all the possible Divine Dignities or Names of God. He felt that being able to name and catalog all the possible archetypal powers would enable him to understand all of nature. Lully was now ready to ground his experience as the "returns again to Earth" part of the Distillation process began. Inspired with the idea that there existed a universal philosophy for all mankind, Lully spread word of the new doctrine with the zeal of a missionary. His ego and any concerns about his own safety were completely overshadowed by his experience. He arranged an audience with the Pope to inform the pontiff of his visions, and in England he taught spiritual alchemy to the abbot of Westminster and was actually employed by King Edward III to practice alchemy and produce gold in the Tower of London. When Lully learned that the king intended to use the gold for less than spiritual ends, he refused to cooperate further and was imprisoned, though he later escaped and fled to the continent. Lully continued to preach his unique blend of Christianity and

Hermeticism, about which he reputedly authored 480 books. In his *Book of the Ascent and Descent of Mind*, Lully describes a vertical axis of reality much like that in Hermes' vision of the Above and the Below.

While a prolific author, Lully was not always the most popular orator. In his zeal to spread his ideology, he stepped on a lot of toes. The Catholic Church eventually labeled him a heretic, and his Arabian audiences suspected he was making gold to fund the Crusades. During a speech in one Arabian city, he was attacked and stabbed in the chest by an assassin. The young Arab was so distraught that he had not succeeded in killing the alchemist that he strangled himself in his cell. Later, Lully was himself imprisoned by the king of Tunis, who sentenced him to death for blasphemy. Only the appeals of a learned Arabian priest saved him from execution, although Lully was banished from Tunis and prohibited from returning on pain of death. In Algiers, the authorities had a horse bridle locked into Lully's mouth for forty days, beat him publicly, and expelled him from their kingdom too.

Despite being banished from most of northern Africa, Lully continued preaching there. He sneaked back into Tunis on numerous occasions and was apprehended twice. The first time he spent six months in prison before the pleas of wealthy citizens from Genoa won his release. The second time, the persistent philosopher was not so lucky. The authorities released him to a mob who chased the eighty-six-year-old man through the streets of town and finally cornered him at the end of a pier, where they stoned him to death. That night, a mysterious pyramid of light formed over the heap of stones under which his crushed form laid. The great light attracted several boats, one of which contained merchants from Genoa, who recognized his torn body and took it back to Italy for burial.

Stories about Raymond Lully's miraculous powers spread after his death, and demand for his books grew. Colleges were founded throughout Europe to teach his philosophy, and at one point, the Catholic Church even considered him a candidate for sainthood. Lully's real achievement, however, was demonstrating to the world the redeeming power of divine inspiration and the power of alchemical Distillation to make of us an "instrument of God" and spread our illumination to those still living in darkness.

The Fifth Element

Giving up your self totally—distilling the essence of your life experiences and divorcing yourself from the concerns of living in the everyday world—is what is required of Distillation, about which we will learn more in chapter 16, “Distillation: Consecration of the Stone.” The purpose is to ensure that no traces of psychic impurities like ego survive. This death of ego and its trappings is really the goal of all the previous stages, too. That we must die to be reborn is the theme of alchemy, first revealed in the Emerald Tablet and summarized in the Emerald Formula of *Solve et Coagula* (Dissolve and Coagulate).³ It means to dissolve all that is inferior within us, including our own identity if need be, and coagulate our eternal essence into a new personality and a new body that incorporates the powers of both the Above and the Below. That glorious, final stage of alchemy is the subject of the fifth rubric, the Rubric of the Stone:

*Thus will you obtain the Glory of the Whole Universe.
All Obscurity will be clear to you.
This is the greatest Force of all powers,
because it overcomes every Subtle thing
and penetrates every Solid thing.*

The five lines of the fifth rubric of the Emerald Tablet describe a fifth element, what the alchemists called the Quintessence. The fifth element is something very special—something beyond ordinary matter, akin to the twinkling light of the eternal stars. It is formed in the Fermentation process and released with the rising vapors of Distillation. According to the alchemists, these powerful vapors condense into a red elixir that “cures defects in corrupt metals” as well as in the human body. Under the right conditions, after repeated distilling of the isolated essence, a process known as sublimation occurs, in which a red powder magically forms on the sides of the flask’s neck as the rising vapors cool.

According to the alchemists, the ultimate transmuting substance formed during the final stage of alchemy is the Greater Stone, or Philosopher’s Stone. This transmuting substance can then be added or “projected” into any base material, which can be anything from lead to the human soul. A miraculous transmutation takes place that immediately perfects any

substance, changing metals into gold, soul into spirit. The sixteenth-century alchemist Gerard Dorn advised his fellow seekers to “transmute yourselves from dead stones into living Philosophical Stones” and to project their highest aspirations into reality.

Every one of the alchemists were unceasing in their praise of the Stone. “You shall see the Stone of the Philosophers go forth from the bedchamber, from his Glassy Sepulchre,” wrote Heinrich Khunrath in *Amphitheatrum Sapientia (Amphitheater of Wisdom, Hanover, 1609)* “in his glorified body, like a Lord of Lords, from his throne into the Theater of the World. That is to say, regimented and more than perfect, a shining carbuncle, most temperate splendor, whose most subtle and depurated parts are inseparably united into one. The whole mass shines red like a ruby, which redness is a sign of a perfect fixation and fixed perfection; permanently giving color and tingeing, fixed in all trials, even in the examination of the burning Sulfur itself and the devouring Waters, and in the most vehement persecution of the Fire, always incombustible and permanent in the Fire as the Salamander.”

The Stone has all the paradoxical characteristics of the First Matter but is now completely subjugated to the One Mind and under the alchemist’s conscious control. English dramatist Ben Jonson described it in his satirical play *The Alchemist* (1614): “Tis a stone and not; a Stone: a spirit, a soul, and a body, which if you do dissolve it, it is dissolved; if you coagulate it, it is coagulated; and, if you make it fly, it flies!”

The Coagulation of Siddhartha Gautama

Siddhartha⁴ was born in 560 B.C.E. to the ruling family of the kingdom of Sakya, located on the border between Nepal and India. Like Balinas, his early childhood was accompanied by prophecies of his divinity and greatness. It is said that eight wise men were invited to his name-giving ceremony, and that after much deliberation they decided on the name Siddhartha, which means “one whose aim is accomplished.” The eight wise men prophesized that he would become a powerful monarch if he stayed at home but would become a truly enlightened man if he traveled. Seven days after his birth, his

mother died, and Siddhartha was raised by an aunt. His father gave the boy every luxury, including three palaces in which to spend the winter, summer, and rainy seasons, and surrounded him with servants that catered to his every whim. The king wanted to make sure his son would never be tempted to leave the kingdom and even arranged his marriage to a beautiful cousin when Siddhartha was sixteen years old. Yet the boy always seemed preoccupied with his own thoughts and could often be found sitting in a corner or cross-legged under a tree, absorbed in meditation.



The greatest force of all powers: the opposing forces of the Sun and Moon united in the Stone. (Daniel Stolcius, Viridarium Chymicum, Frankfurt 1624)

It was not until he was in his twenties that the Calcination of Siddhartha began. Slowly, the scenes of suffering he glimpsed while traveling through his kingdom took their toll on his conscience. At the age of twenty-nine, he gave away his belongings, renounced his princely life, and became a wandering ascetic, vowing to seek out holy men who could teach him how to

get beyond himself and break the endless chain of human misery. Under their tutelage, he attained mystical states of consciousness in the Above which he described variously as the “sphere of no-thing” or the “sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.” However, Siddhartha remained unsatisfied and intensified his Calcination through self-mortification and fasting that left him near death.

“Because of so little nourishment,” he said of his condition at the time, “all my limbs became like some withered creepers with knotted joints; my buttocks like a buffalo’s hoof; my backbone protruding like a string of balls; my ribs like rafters of a dilapidated shed; the pupils of my eyes appeared sunk deep in their sockets as water appears shining at the bottom of a deep well. When I wanted to obey the calls of nature, I fell down on my face then and there. When I stroked my limbs with my hand, hairs rotted at the roots fell away from my body.”

Caught in the throes of bodily and psychological Dissolution for six years, Siddhartha had to deal not only with the toxins being released by his body, but also with powerful hidden forces surfacing from his unconscious mind. He experienced many terrifying visions, though most took the form of the god Mara, an incarnation of evil known as the Lord of Passions. Mara demanded that Siddhartha give up his attempts at Dissolution to “live again” and tempted him with images of lust and debauchery. However, Siddhartha finally achieved the Dissolution of self he had been seeking and therefore possessed no psychic mirror in which the demons from his subconscious could take shape.

Next, Siddhartha entered a phase of rationality and Separation in which he filtered through his experiences and decided what was truly useful and what was illusion. By preserving only the most genuine essences of his former self during the Separation process, Siddhartha entered the Conjunction phase of his enlightenment with the purest spiritual passion. His desire to pull himself together as a new person, acknowledging all true parts of both himself and the universe, resulted in the union of his conscious with his subconscious mind, which was the sacred marriage of the masculine and feminine parts of his being. Now, at last integrated and whole, he discovered his true Self and was infused with new energy and purpose in a perfect melding of mind with body. He understood that the austerities he had practiced were no longer of value to him, and that no extremes of behavior

could of themselves lead to enlightenment. He started paying attention to his body again and began eating only proper amounts of food.

As is characteristic of the Conjunction, Siddhartha could now clearly see what steps were necessary to complete his own perfection. One morning, he sat down beneath an assattha tree (now renamed the bodhi tree), crossed his legs in meditation, and determined not to rise again until he had achieved enlightenment. Within the hour, his Putrefaction—the blackest phase of his life—began as hordes of hideous demons and monsters of all shapes and sizes arose from the deepest recesses of his mind. Led once again by the personification of the devil Mara, the army of evil assaulted Siddhartha from all angles, yet, knowing they were illusions, he did not flee nor show any fear, and sat still and whole before them. By evening, the armies of Mara were vanquished.

Thus purified of his demons, the heavens opened up to Siddhartha and his Fermentation began. First he read the heavenly records and saw how the matter of his spirit, which was his soul, had suffered through a myriad of former existences over its long evolution. Then, his consciousness was infused with the light of the One Mind as he received the “super-human divine eye” and traveled along the cosmic axis of reality. There he saw how all things and all beings originate or are “conditioned” through this higher realm of archetypal powers. “My mind was emancipated,” he said of the experience. “Ignorance was dispelled, knowledge arose, darkness was dispelled, light arose.” Siddhartha was so ripe for Fermentation that the whole process took place in one day. At the age of thirty-two, during the night of the full moon in the month of May, 528 B.C.E., at a place now named Bodh Gaya in India, Siddhartha attained enlightenment.

The Distillation process began immediately the following day, and for the next seven weeks, Siddhartha reflected on his experience in order to reformulate it in terms that he and others could understand without contamination by his own ego or some anthropomorphic viewpoint. From his divine revelation, Siddhartha distilled four Noble Truths. First, everyday human existence consists of confusion, conflict, dissatisfaction, and suffering. Second, this torturous existence is caused by man’s ego—his selfish craving for fame, fortune, and power over others. Third, the only way to attain freedom from this lateral or worldly reality was to achieve Nirvana—that is, to enter the vertical or cosmic axis of reality. Fourth, the direction

to that hidden reality is through the “Middle Way” between self-indulgence and self-mortification. According to the Buddhist tradition, the Middle Way is an eightfold path that consists of: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right mode of living, right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right concentration. “Right” in this sense means in alignment with the divine will, the higher truth Siddhartha had experienced firsthand.

Furthermore, Siddhartha saw that the One Thing from which all things originate is forever changing. Because of this, there can be no everlasting matter, only the immortal consciousness of the One Mind in which everything is relative to and connected to everything else. He called this supreme process the “Wheel of Dharma,” or the unfolding of ultimate Truth. It is identical to the alchemists’ concept of the cosmic Ouroboros (the snake eating its own tail) from which all reality emanates. In many ways, the eight-spoked Dharma Wheel is the One Thing of Hermes. It is also similar to Akhenaten’s concept of the Aten, just as his “living in truth” rule can be likened to Siddhartha’s concept of “right” behavior. Both men sought to teach people how to live in accord with the higher reality, the existence of which each had personally verified. Only by living in accord with this truth could mankind’s suffering be alleviated.

But Siddhartha worried about how he could get people to understand such things without having experienced the Wheel of Dharma themselves. “I have realized this Dharma which is deep, difficult to see, difficult to understand,” he said, “and only comprehensible by the wise. Men who are overpowered by a mass of darkness cannot see this Dharma, which is against the current, lofty, deep, subtle, and hard to understand.” Nonetheless, Siddhartha decided to go out into the world and openly teach the truths he had learned. He believed there were levels of understanding among people and at least some would sense whereof he spoke. With this earthly grounding of his otherworldly vision, the Coagulation of Siddhartha’s spirit began. He traveled throughout India, Nepal, and Ceylon, preaching everywhere and gaining many disciples. He soon came to be known as the Buddha (the Enlightened One) and offered people refuge from the world in a holy trinity he named the Triple Jewel, which consisted of the Buddha himself, the Order he was creating, and the Dharma he had witnessed firsthand.

Before long, Siddhartha started exhibiting miraculous abilities, which he felt were distracting from his real message. So he tried to trivialize his powers

and ordered his disciples to never perform miracles in public. He also became known for his ability to convert any opponent, even hardened murderers, to his view by reaching that person's own level of spiritual development and showing him what was yet Above. He returned to his home in Sakya and made disciples of his father and most of the kingdom, and before long monasteries and temples of his followers sprang up throughout Asia. Today, there are more than 350 million Buddhists worldwide.

At the age of eighty, Siddhartha became ill and soon announced to his followers that he had "decided" to die. During his last weeks, he traveled to several temples where he charged his disciples to continue working to combine within themselves the powers of both the Above and the Below: "Make yourselves your island, make yourselves, not anyone else, your refuge; make the Dharma your island, the Dharma your refuge, nothing else your refuge." Finally, he stopped at the house of a longtime disciple, an alchemist known as Cunda, who gave him a mysterious elixir. After Siddhartha consumed all he could, he asked that anything left over be buried, because no one would be able to assimilate it but a person who had completed spiritual alchemy.

That was Siddhartha's last meal. He traveled on to the town of Kasia, and, as evening approached, he lay down on a couch between two sal trees, where he expired, "mindful and self-possessed," on the night of the full moon in May 480 B.C.E. His body was cremated and his relics divided into eight parts and distributed to various kingdoms. Special monuments known as "stupas"—geometric structures symbolizing Buddha's progression through the alchemical elements to Nirvana—were built to house his possessions.

As Siddhartha lay dying, he reviewed the cosmic alchemy he had witnessed with one of his most devoted disciples: "Do not weep, dear friend. Have I not told you that Separation is inevitable from all near and dear to us? Whatever is born, produced, conditioned, contains within itself the nature of its own Dissolution. It cannot be otherwise." To the others gathered around him, he said: "Do not forget that death is only the end of the physical body. The body was born from parents and was nourished by food; just as inevitable are sickness and death. But the true Buddha is not a human body—it is enlightenment. A human body must die, but the wisdom of enlightenment will exist forever in the truth of the Dharma and in the practice of the Dharma. He who sees merely my body does not truly see me. Only he

who accepts my teaching truly sees me. After my death, the Dharma shall be your teacher. Follow the Dharma and you will be true to me. I have withheld nothing from my teachings. There is no secret teaching, no hidden meaning; everything has been taught openly and clearly. My dear disciples, this is the end. In a moment, I shall be passing into Nirvana.” Those were Siddhartha’s last words before he attained the ultimate Coagulation of his spirit.

The Philosopher’s Stone

Having directly experienced the higher truths, Siddhartha could have chosen to continue to savor them within himself in a kind of spiritual onanism that would have grown into an impenetrable arrogance over lesser men. Instead, he chose to incarnate it within himself, to live by it, to speak of it, to teach it to others. In that way, he made it *real*. The alchemists called this coming together of divine revelation and human determination the Philosopher’s Stone. It is an enlightened and enduring state of consciousness that can literally change reality.

This Stone is the perfected First Matter within us, the purification of the soul and its union with the spirit. On the physical level, the Stone is the state of consciousness that is psychokinetically active, just as the One Mind creates and controls the planets and the stars. The ultimate perfection of soul or matter cannot be achieved by only using “scientific” methods that narrowly focus on certain aspects of reality. To succeed, the alchemist must enter the whole spectrum of reality and appeal to the archetypal forces so that the four elements of the Below and the three elements of the Above unite, thus combining “the powers of both the Above and the Below.” In the words of Saint Paul, whose Fermentation experience on the road to Galilee is well known to Christians, “It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from Heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:42).

The empowered soul at this stage is the hidden spiritual envelope become

manifest, and it is sometimes referred to as the Garment of Light, or Robe of Glory. It is a cabalistic dictum that no soul can operate without a garment. This garment is the One Thing within us, the Salt of our true being, that we can show to others as if we were putting on a change of clothes that finally suits us. “This Salt is the true grain, the seed not only of this world but of the next,” states the Rosicrucian book *Fama et Confession (An Accounting and Confession)*, Frankfort, 1615), “and it is the mystery that God has made. It is a living Water, wherein there dwells a Divine Fire, and this Fire binds the parts thereof to itself, coagulates them and stops their flux. And Salt is also the eternal Water which does not wet the hands, for this Fire is the life, and therefore hinders death.”

“The Philosopher’s Stone is called the most ancient, secret or unknown, natural incomprehensible, heavenly, blessed sacred Stone of the Sages,” declares the *Sophic Hydrolith*. “It is described as being true, more certain than certainty itself, the arcanum of all arcana—the Divine virtue and efficacy, which is hidden from the foolish, the aim and end of all things under heaven, the wonderful epilogue of conclusion of all the labors of the Sages—the perfect essence of all the elements, the indestructible body which no element can injure, the Quintessence; the double and living mercury which has in itself the heavenly spirit—the cure for all unsound and imperfect metals—the everlasting light—the panacea for all diseases—the glorious Phoenix—the most precious of all treasures—the chief good of Nature.”

Obviously nothing in the universe can top this Stone, which is supreme on all the levels in which it manifests. Whether it is the state of mind of a winning athlete, the focus of an inspired speaker, the altered consciousness of a mystic, the outcome of an experiment, or the ultimate union of the One Mind and the One Thing, the Stone is perfection. It is the crystal-clear diamond that began as a lump of coal, the soft, impure, and unshaped First Matter. In chapter 17 (“Coagulation: *Ultima Materia* of the Soul”), we will see how Coagulation works in everyday life and learn how to apply it to all our goals, both practical and spiritual. First, however, we must grasp the overall Pattern of which Coagulation is the final step. That is revealed in the sixth rubric of the Emerald Tablet.

¹ Dionysius was St. Paul’s convert at Athens. Pseudo-Dionysius was a Catholic monk who used his name to write about esoteric doctrines not accepted by the church. The quotation is from his *Mystical Theology*, which

dates from around 550 C.E. He penned another controversial text called *The Divine Names* that was translated from Greek into Latin in the ninth century by the Irish theologian John Scotus Erigena. Both Erigena's writings and those of Pseudo-Dionysius were labeled blasphemous by the church because the two men believed union with the divine could take place in this life as well as in the hereafter.

2 Information on the life of Raymond Lully is taken from Arthur Edward Waite, *Alchemists through the Ages* (Blauvelt, New York: Steiner Publications, 1970) and *Raymund Lully: Illuminated Doctor, Alchemist and Christian Mystic* (Edmonds, Washington: Holmes Publishing, 1993). Lully's principal work is the *Ars Magna* (The Great Art, Majorca, Spain, 1308), which includes the treatises *Arbor Scientiae* (The Tree of Knowledge) and *Liber de Ascensu et Descensu Intellectus* (The Book of the Ascent and Descent of Mind).

3 *Solve et Coagula* is the intransitive Latin form of the Emerald Formula. The complete phrase is *Solvite Corpora et Coagulate Spiritus*, which means "Dissolve the Body and Coagulate the Spirit."

4 The story of the life of Siddhartha is based on biographical information from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* as well as from Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, *The Teaching of Buddha* (Tokyo: Buddhist Promoting Foundation, 1995) and John Snelling, *The Elements of Buddhism* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991).



Chapter 9

THIS IS THE PATTERN

The Evolving Universe

The sixth rubric of the Emerald Tablet is known as the Pattern Rubric, because it acknowledges that the tablet contains a formula or pattern that can be used to change reality in the same way that the universe itself was created. By following the Pattern, anyone can personally verify the truths presented in the tablet and apply the formula in their own lives. The rubric states:

In this way was the Universe created.

*From this there comes many wondrous Applications,
because this is the Pattern.*

Isaac Newton, who spent more time studying alchemy than physics, completed his own translation of the Emerald Tablet in 1680 but kept it secret. In fact, he never published any of his alchemical work and urged other alchemists not to make anything public, since mankind was not ready for such truths, and it would only cause “immense damage to the world.” He cautioned that “Other things than the transmutation of metals are involved in alchemy.”¹ Like most alchemists of his time, he followed the Pattern set down in the Emerald Tablet in his experiments. Isaac Newton’s translation of the sixth rubric reads: “From this are and do come admirable adaptations whereof your process is here in this [tablet].”

A similar interpretation of this rubric is provided by a twelfth-century Latin translation: “From this comes marvelous adaptations of which this is the procedure.” Alchemist Georgio Beato in *Aurelium Occultae Philosophorum* (*Hidden Gold of the Philosophers*, Frankfort, 1610) translates it as: “This is the way by which these marvels may be brought about.” An ancient Phoenician version reads: “Hence admirable works are accomplished which are carried out according to the same mode.” Almost all versions of the tablet interpret this rubric to mean it contains some sort of larger pattern

that becomes more obvious to us as we mature and are more capable of understanding it.

However, a few translations of the Emerald Tablet refer to the tablet itself as an example of the Pattern. In other words, the physical tablet itself, that miraculous monolith molded from green crystal or emerald, is a practical demonstration of these powers. It is known that Balinas left gemstone talismans hidden in the sanctuaries of religious groups throughout the world. He tried to charge these objects with his own spiritual power in order to renew the group's connection to the Above, and so many miracles were attributed to the talismans of Balinas that they became very valuable. In his role as the third Hermes, did Balinas fashion an emerald talisman engraved with a succinct summary of the principles by which he lived? Along these lines, it should be noted that the alchemists sometimes referred to the Emerald Tablet as the *Lapsit Exilas*, the "thin stone" which "glided" or "slid" from heaven to earth. The divine object was said to contain an encoded pattern from which all matter was created, actually containing within itself the powers of the One Thing.

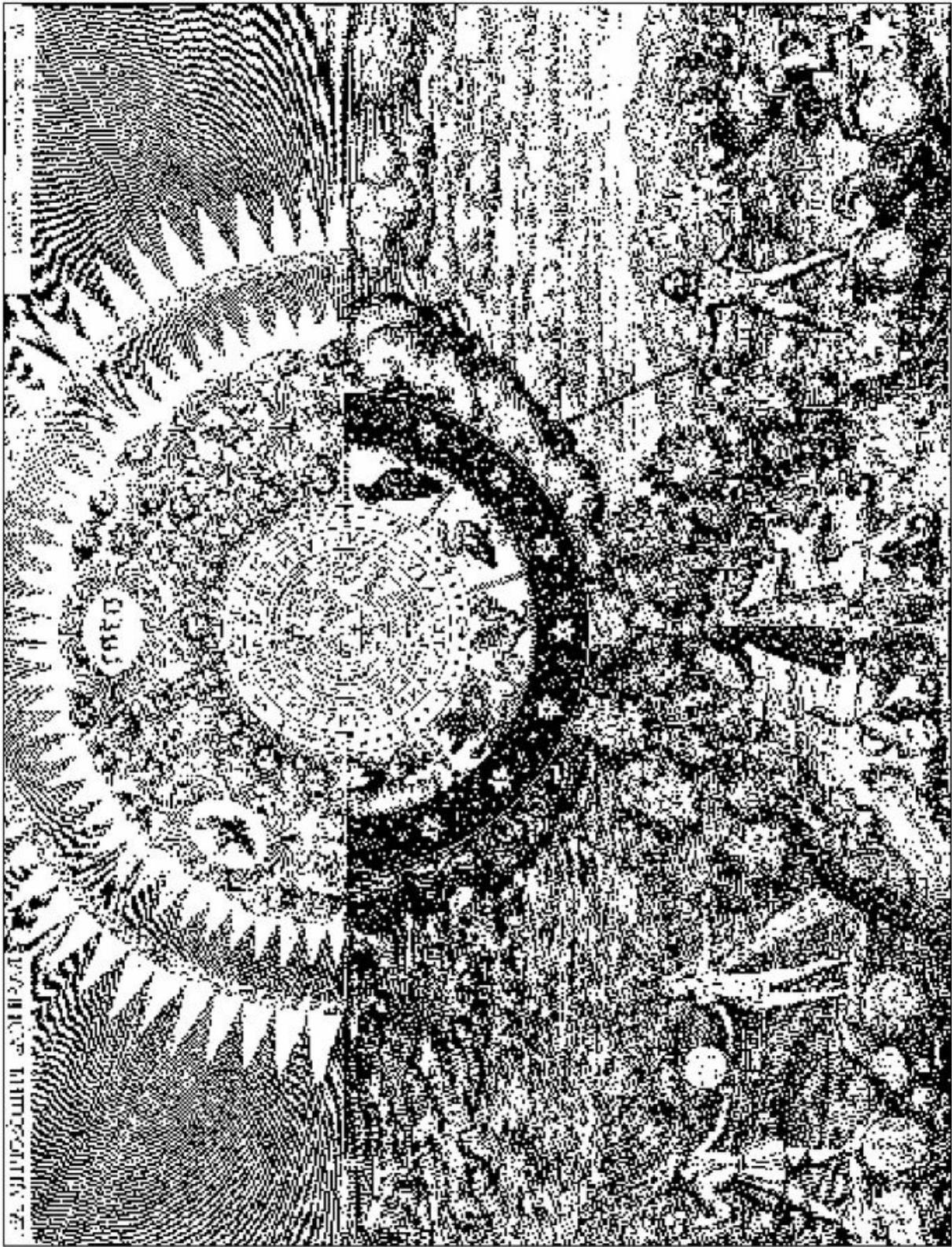
There are also a few sources that interpret the word "Pattern" to mean sample. These imply that the original Emerald Tablet contained a magical elixir or specimen of the One Thing. That could account for descriptions of the tablet as glowing or iridescent in appearance. Such interpretations are based on the emphasis the tablet places on manifestation, as well as its overall numerology. For instance, this rubric contains the fourth mention of the word "universe," implying that it is intended in a physical and not a philosophical sense.

No matter how this rubric is interpreted, the basic message is that the Emerald Tablet also includes a way to verify the truths it asserts. Since the tablet works on many levels, it would not be surprising to find the formula stated in chemical, psychological, and spiritual terms. In chapter 20 ("The Chemistry of Miracles"), we will examine a chemical formula decoded from the tablet that produces an impressive laboratory experiment which openly demonstrates all the principles contained in the tablet. In the meantime, we will take a look at a piece of art that also claims to demonstrate the secrets of the Emerald Tablet on all levels.

The Emerald Tablet Engraving

The best way to grasp the overall pattern referred to in rubric six is to envision all the precepts of the Emerald Tablet within one drawing or image. That was exactly what artist Matthieu Merian had in mind when he began a very special engraving for inclusion in Daniel Mylius's *Opus Medico-Chymicum* (The Medical-Chemical Work), which was published in 1618. Merian titled his work *Tabula Smaragdina*, which is Latin for "Emerald Tablet," and his goal was to incorporate all the truths contained in the tablet in one awe-inspiring vision.

This beautiful work on the following page shows in dramatic detail the birth of the Philosopher's Stone as it leaves heaven and enters earth. The picture immediately joined dozens of other alchemical mandalas which alchemists used for meditation, and many medieval alchemists sat staring at it for hours trying to absorb its power. Because of the importance of this particular work, we are going to examine it in some detail, so that those interested in using it for meditation will have a basic understanding of the many symbols it contains.



The Emerald Tablet engraving is said to contain all the symbols of

alchemy. (Daniel Mylius, Opus Medico-Chymicum, Frankfort 1618)

The first thing that strikes one about the picture is its obvious division into the Above and the Below, and the sharp line between the two indicates that these are very different realms. In the Above, the larger Sun of the One Mind, whose rays encompass the whole universe, rises behind the Sun of Heaven, or what Hermes called “Mind the Maker.” This intermediate Sun is dominated by twenty-nine cherubs or archetypal forces. In numerology, the number twenty-nine is equivalent to the number two, thus signifying the embryonic division of the One Mind to create Mind the Maker, which carries on the primary creation through the “crystallized thoughts of God”—the archetypes. The three smaller Suns floating among the angels represent the three heavenly elements expressed as the Holy Trinity: Sulfur (the Tetragrammaton of God at the center), Mercury (the Son, the sacrificial Lamb of God), and Salt (the Dove or Holy Ghost hidden in matter). In the generic terms of the Emerald Tablet, this trinity is made up of the One Mind (Father), the expression of the One Mind (Son), and the primal One Thing (Holy Ghost).

The Below is divided into the daytime (solar) left side of the drawing and the nighttime (lunar) right side. At the very bottom of the picture, one can find the purified four elements sealed inside glass balls carried by two different birds. On the left, Fire and Air are under the outstretched wings of the Phoenix, a bird of myth and imagination that rose from the ashes of fire to be reborn with dominion over the spheres of Fire and Air. On the right, Water and Earth are covered by the wings of a real bird, the *Aquilla*, or eagle, who has dominion over the spheres of Water and Earth. Thus the rising elements of Fire and Air represent spiritual or psychological processes, whereas the sinking elements of Water and Earth are physical or bodily processes.

The left or solar side of the engraving represents the process of Calcination. At the bottom left corner is a lion standing upright like a man. Known to alchemists as the Red Lion, he symbolizes the fiery, masculine energy of the Work. Behind him is daylight, and trees and a village can be seen. The lion is wearing a collar of stars and represents the cosmic forces emanating from the constellation of Leo, which figured so prominently in Egyptian religion and is the inspiration for the Sphinx, which symbolizes the

astrological age of Leo. The Red Lion's right foot rests on top of a seven-rayed sun while his other foot is supported by the wing of the Phoenix. He is presenting a naked man with a thirteen-rayed Sun, symbol of the Hermetic Mysteries, said to be revealed to mankind over 10,000 years ago. The man is Sol, who represents the masculine component of nature and personality. Sol's genitals are covered by a small sun, as is his right breast, though his other breast is covered by the crescent moon, which is the seed of the feminine in all men. His right foot is on the wing of the Phoenix and his left foot rests on a seven-rayed Sun identical to the one on which the lion stands. These seven rays are the Seven Steps of Transformation that make up the Emerald Formula, which we will begin examining in Part Two of this book. Sol is chained by his left hand to the Clouds of Unknowing, which keep us from experiencing the splendor of the Above.

The right or lunar side of the engraving represents the process of Dissolution. In the bottom right corner can be seen a stag standing upright like a man. Known to alchemists as the "Fugitive Stag," he is a symbol of volatile Mercury and the feminine, watery energy of the Work. He has a twelve-pointed rack of antlers, and each antler has a star over it, representing the influences of the zodiac. In mythology, this is Acteon, the mythical hunter who was turned into a stag for admiring the nude Artemis while she was bathing in a pond. Artemis was the Greek goddess of nature and fertility who later was worshipped by the Romans as Diana. In both incarnations, the goddess stood for the deep creative and curative powers of the subconscious mind and nature. The left foot of her stag is planted firmly on the earth, while his right foot rests on the wing of the eagle. In his left hand is a three-leaf clover, representing the three heavenly forces in nature, and in his other hand is the Moon, which he is passing on to a naked woman.

Known as Luna, the naked woman is the feminine component of nature as expressed in one's personality. Her genitals are covered by a crescent moon, as is her left breast, but her right breast is a small seven-rayed sun—the active though internalized Emerald Formula—from which streams a shower of stars (the Milky Way) that is immediately grounded and absorbed directly into the earth. Luna straddles over the Hermetic River with both feet on the right wing of the eagle. Behind her is a night scene in which the outlines of trees, valleys, and mountains can be discerned. In her left hand she holds a bunch of grapes, a symbol of sacrifice, but her right hand is chained to the Clouds of

Unknowing.

In the center of the Below, a hermaphroditic alchemist holds up two starry hatchets which represent the higher faculty of discernment and the powers of Separation. The alchemist has cut the chains of unknowing that tied Sol and Luna to their duality and balanced the powerful forces of their sexual attraction. He has seen through the Clouds of Unknowing, gained his freedom from instinct, and realizes the powerful influences of the archetypal powers. The empowered alchemist is symbolic of a successful Conjunction of the opposing forces to his left and right. Half of his frock is black with white stars and the other half is white with black stars. In other words, each side contains the seed of its opposite, so he has neither denied nor destroyed the compelling powers of the opposites, only integrated them into his own being. The alchemist is located on the side of a mountain and stands on two lions who have a single head. The lion on the left is the Red Lion and the one on the right is the Green Lion. As shown by the Fire and Water emerging from the mountain behind their tails, these two lions represent Sulfur and Mercury, the alchemist's spirit and soul, which unite to produce the Ferment—the precursor of the Stone—which is symbolized by the thick substance flowing from the common mouth of the beasts. Thus the alchemist himself represents this union of Fire and Water. This melding of rational with irrational, reason and feeling, male and female, is a necessary part of any act of creation.

Directly behind the alchemist are three rows of seven plants that stand for the seven operations of alchemy done three times to perfection. First are two rows of six bushes culminating in the seventh Tree of Gold at the summit. Each bush is marked with alchemical signs for the seven metallic compounds. Behind the bushes is a semicircle of trees, each marked with a symbol for one of the seven metals.

At the top of the mountain, the Clouds of Unknowing part and the powers of the Above touch and overwhelm the top of the tree with the sign for gold. This is the actual act of Fermentation, the penetration of the purified essence by forces from the Above. A line drawn from the Ferment in the Below to the name of God in the Above divides the engraving in half and bisects the alchemist through the middle of his being. That line, which is the Cosmic Axis, or vertical axis of reality, connects him through the Tree of Gold and the central Stone directly to God. It travels through all three realms, starting in the Physical Realm, transecting the psychological processes of the Realm

of the Soul, and reaching its highest point in the Realm of the Spirit.

The first area encountered as the alchemist travels along this vertical axis is a Ring of Stars, in which seven larger stars predominate. This stellar ring presents the seven alchemical operations as cosmic principles available to sentient species everywhere. It is followed by a semicircle of five scenes that lead to the Quintessence. This register of alchemical accomplishments is known as the Ring of Planets, and each scene depicts the bird of spirit associated with one of the five heavenly bodies. These are the five operations that lead in both directions to the remaining operations, which are the Separation and Fermentation of the Quintessence. From left to right: the Black Crow of Calcination (Saturn), the White Goose of Dissolution (Jupiter), the Rooster of Conjunction (Earth), the Pelican of Distillation (Venus), and finally, the Phoenix of Coagulation (Sun). The symbolism of these birds is elaborated on in chapters 11-17.

Above the Ring of Stars and the Ring of Planets, and partaking of all realms, is a central sphere made up of seven concentric layers. These layers symbolize each of the Seven Steps of Transformation that must be achieved or peeled away to reach the Stone, which is the innermost sphere in which a triangle is inscribed. Within the first sphere are the twelve signs of the zodiac. These are personal and karmic archetypes of the personality that are burned away by the intensified fires of existence in the operation the alchemists named Calcination. The second sphere is inscribed with three Latin phrases meaning “Year of the Winds,” “Year of the Sun,” and “Year of the Stars.” These are the transpersonal archetypes resolved and released during the long process of Dissolution. The third concentric sphere within the layered ball at the center of this engraving describes the three kinds of Mercury (Common Mercury, Bodily Mercury, and Philosophical Mercury). These are the essences of soul released in the previous two operations and saved during the filtering process of Separation. The fourth sphere names the three kinds of Sulfur (Combustible Sulfur, Fixed Sulfur, and Volatile or Ethereal Sulfur). The forces in the third and fourth spheres are the driving spiritual passions of the Conjunction, in which the opposing parts of our personalities, the Mercury and Sulfur of our being, are united in the common goal of transformation. The fifth inner sphere refers to the Quintessence, the newly formed matter or Salt unveiled during Fermentation. Inscribed in this sphere are the three types of Salt (Elementary Salt, Salt of the Earth, and the Central

Salt). The next and sixth sphere contains a message written in Latin which warns: “You must find the four grades of Fire of the Work.” As we have seen, these four grades refer to the various states of consciousness that must be understood and purified during Distillation so that they do not contaminate the Work in its final stage.

The seventh and innermost sphere contains a central upward-pointing triangle of Fire, which represents the sublimated state of distilled consciousness that is congealed in the Above and remains there. Within that triangle is drawn the symbol for the exalted Mercury, the Monad or One Thing perfected, which is the Stone. In the middle of the symbol is a single dot, the center of the entire engraving and around which both heaven and earth revolve. It is the convergence point in our minds and personalities where all things come together as one thought. To the left of the large triangle is a smaller downward-pointing triangle representing Water or Mercury; to the right is a small upward-pointing triangle representing Fire or Sulfur. Below the central triangle is the Star of David, which symbolizes Salt, the union of Fire and Water, the permanent coming together of the Above and the Below.

This wonderful engraving is a summary of how the Mercury of our souls is exposed and purified in the Work. United with the Sulfur of our spirits, it undergoes Coagulation to form the Salt of the Philosophers, the immortal, permanently enlightened, and wholly incarnated state of consciousness known as the Stone. Like the concentric target that it forms at the very center of this engraving, this is our perfected being and ultimate home.

Three Realms of Manifestation

The final, seventh rubric of the Emerald Tablet identifies its author, the revealer of the Emerald Formula, and is known as the Trinity Rubric:

Therefore am I called Thrice Greatest Hermes, having all three parts of the wisdom of the Whole Universe. Herein have I completely explained the Operation of the Sun.

What makes Hermes thrice greatest? Through his enlightenment, Hermes

has conquered all three levels of reality; the Spiritual World of the subtle mind and imagination, the Mental World of our personality and influences of our hidden souls, and the Physical World of gross matter, our human bodies, as well as the Stone, which is the ultimate spiritual embodiment. These levels are represented esoterically as the Sun, Moon, and Earth. In alchemical terms they are higher states of consciousness called Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt.

The entity named Hermes Trismegistus has also experienced three incarnations. He first appeared as Thoth, whom the Egyptians worshipped as the God of Thought and who preserved the knowledge of ultimate truth through the great, cleansing Flood, so that the worthy still might have a chance at transformation. Next, he appeared as Akhenaten, the pharaoh who worshipped the Aten, the One Thing, and sought to live in accordance with the providence of the One Mind. Thirdly, he came to us as Balinas, the misfit youth whose rediscovery of the tablet transformed his life, and whose tireless work in Alexandria made it possible for the contents of the miraculous document to be transmitted to our own era.

These incarnations of Hermes correspond to the three great cosmic emanations. First was the original act of Thought, the creation of the universe, the grand union of Fire and Water accomplished by the action of the One Mind on the One Thing. Second was the Birth of Light within matter, the rise of spirit and creation of consciousness to accomplish the evolution of soul. Finally came the Virgin Birth from the union of spirit and soul within man, which represents the second creation, man purified and reborn on a higher level. This reunion of spirit and soul is the Christ consciousness that was demonstrated not only in the life of Jesus, but in the life of Balinas and others as well, and which any person can obtain having been shown the way—what Hermes called the Pattern. The all-encompassing Pattern of Hermes is nothing less than the perfection of the cosmic soul. That this process is evolutionary is evidenced by nature herself, just as we can witness its Pattern in our own lives.

The alchemical process for achieving the perfection of nature is what is referred to in the last line of the last rubric of the Emerald Tablet. The “Operation of Sun” is a way to describe God in the most objective way: the conversion of energy into matter. The self-sufficient sun, feeding off itself through all eternity, is a symbol of the same process going on within our own souls if we only tap into it. The hidden Sun of our deepest being is also like a

nuclear reaction that drives our physical and spiritual transformation. Some people have witnessed that energy firsthand, and its awesome power has frightened them so much that they keep it bottled up inside, where it continues to burn deep within the lead-lined container of self.

However, the union of spirit and soul, the One Mind with the One Thing, is a force that cannot be denied on whatever level it occurs, and it will have its way no matter what we do to contain it. Other more courageous souls have learned to harness that energy with the carbon rods of meditation and use it like a heavenly *viaticum*, a never-ending source of spiritual nourishment. The alchemists believed they could repeat the Pattern put forth in the Emerald Tablet to harness the natural transformative forces at work in the universe and apply them to their own lives and experiments. How to use that tried-and-true formula is the subject of the next part of this book.

¹ Newton's comments, and his following translation of the sixth rubric, are from Betty Jo Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy: The Hunting of the Green Lion* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1984). A more recent work detailing Newton's love of alchemy is Michael White, *Isaac Newton: The Last Sorcerer* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1997).



Part 2

APPLYING THE EMERALD FORMULA



Chapter 10

SEVEN STEPS TO TRANSFORMATION

The Great Work

The alchemists attempted to perfect the One Thing of Hermes, what they called the First Matter, by using specific physical, psychological, and spiritual techniques that they described in chemical terms and demonstrated in laboratory experiments. However, while the alchemistic philosophers spoke in terms of chemicals, furnaces, flasks, and beakers, they were really talking about the changes taking place within their own bodies, minds, and souls. Though in their public writings the alchemists always scrambled the order of the steps of transformation, the Emerald Tablet presents them in their original order. The tablet, which seemed to contain a recipe for the perfection of anything, was the cookbook that guided the alchemists through their experiments. As the first chemists, the alchemists believed they could harness the forces described in the tablet and actually transmute lead into gold in their laboratories. But there was one big difference between the alchemists and modern chemists: The alchemists believed their own state of consciousness would somehow affect the final outcome of their experiments, that the purity of their own souls was a factor in perfecting the metals. For that reason, they worked as much on themselves as they did with their chemicals.

As the first psychologists, the alchemists identified a mixture of seven metals, or mental traits, that were responsible for an individual's "temperament." The transmutation of these base metals into gold was the perfection of their personalities, and, as mystics, they meditated frequently, exposing their very souls to the processes of alchemy. Actually, the alchemists always had two laboratories in which they worked. One was the laboratory of beakers and smelly chemicals in which they sought physical perfection. The other was an inner laboratory, a quiet place the alchemist created within himself, a place of no confusion where the Work could

proceed on his soul.

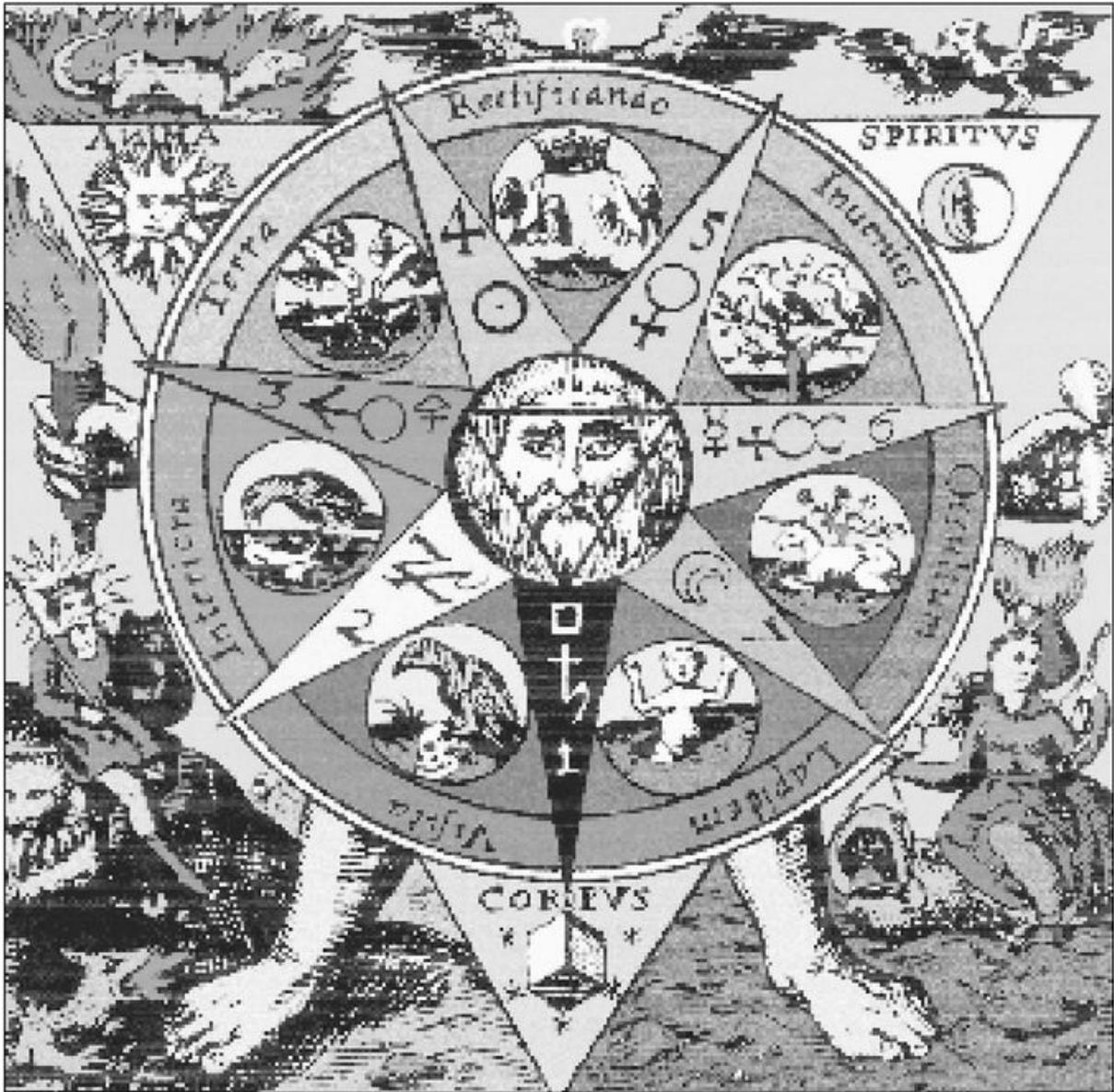
So alchemy was never just an intellectual exercise or an artificial discipline. Alchemists were intimately involved in their experiments and believed their thoughts and feelings were actual forces that could influence the results. It is a view of the power of consciousness, the crucial relationship between observer and experiment, which some quantum physicists have only recently accepted. However, unlike the scientists who developed the atomic bomb, the alchemists never shared their secret formulae with anyone outside their own discipline. The alchemists never made the mistake of trusting their countries' rulers, military powers, or even religious leaders. They invented cryptic symbols and used coded phrases to conceal their knowledge from others, which is why so many of those who sought to unlock their secrets walked away in frustration.

The Emerald Tablet is a Rosetta Stone for deciphering the alchemists' secret manuscripts. Their entire art was based on the principles it contained, and they followed the operations it described with religious zeal. In fact, in the so-called "Grail" layouts of the Emerald Tablet, in which the words were arranged in the shape of a chalice, the place where one grasps the Holy Chalice contains all seven steps. These seven operations are truly at the heart of both the tablet and the discipline of alchemy. From the Nag Hammadi scrolls, discovered in 1945, it was learned that the followers of Hermes were practicing the Seven Steps of Transformation in their initiation ceremonies well before the third century. The probationary period began with the Lesser Mysteries, which were public lessons in the Hermetic texts and correct behavior in light of them. If the initiate progressed to the Greater Mysteries, he began an experiential journey through the seven planets. By applying the operations of the alchemists, the initiate was able to overcome each of the planetary restrictions to return to the stars and be reborn as the true Self hidden in the soul, which is part of the Signature of God in each of us. Having conquered the planetary archetypes, the initiate became the adept, one who is skilled in the operations of alchemy. Next were oral teachings in a one-on-one setting in which the adept experienced a profound alteration of consciousness and beheld the Hermetic truths directly.¹ At this point, the adept became the Master.

The Seven Operations of Alchemy

The alchemists believed that the universal formula contained in the Emerald Tablet was the basis for a spiritual technology first introduced on the planet in ancient Egypt more than 10,000 years ago. This formula consists of seven consecutive operations performed on the “matter”—whether it be of a physical, psychological, or spiritual nature. To guide us through this process, we are going to make use of a tool actually used by the alchemists—a meditative mandala first published in 1659 as an illustration for the book *Azoth of the Philosophers* by the legendary German alchemist Basil Valentine. The word “Azoth” in the title is one of the more arcane names for the One Thing described in the tablet. The “A” and “Z” in the word relate to the Greek alpha and omega, the beginning and end of all things. The word is meant to embrace the full meaning of the One Thing, which is both the chaotic First Matter at the beginning of the Work and the perfected Stone at its conclusion.

At the center of this remarkable drawing is the face of a bearded alchemist at the beginning of the Work. Like looking into a mirror, this is where the initiate fixes his or her attention to meditate on the mandala. Within the downward-pointing triangle superimposed over the face of the alchemist is the goal of the Work, the divine man in which the forces from the Above and the Below have come together. The alchemist’s schematized body is the offspring of the marriage between the archetypal Sun King, seated on a lion on a hill to his right, and the archetypal Moon Queen, seated on a great fish to his left. “Its father is the Sun,” says the tablet, “its mother the Moon.”



The Azoth illustrates the Seven Steps of Transformation in their correct order. (Basil Valentine, L'Azoth des Philosophes, Paris 1659)

The laughing, extroverted Sun King holds a scepter and a shield indicating his authority and strength over the rational, visible world, but the fiery dragon of his rejected unconscious waits in a cave beneath him ready to attack should he grow too arrogant. The melancholy, introverted Moon Queen holds the reins to a great fish, symbolizing her control of those same hidden forces that threaten the king, and behind her is a chaff of wheat, which stands for her connection to fertility and growth. The bow and arrow she

cradles in her left arm symbolize the wounds of the heart and body she accepts as part of her existence. In simplest terms, the king and queen represent the raw materials of our experience—our thoughts and feelings—with which the alchemist works. The king symbolizes the power of thought, ultimately the One Mind of the highest spirit. The queen stands for the influence of uncontrollable feelings and emotions, which are ultimately the chaotic One Thing of the greater soul. The much anticipated marriage of the king and queen produces a state of consciousness best described as a feeling intellect, which can be raised and purified to produce a state of perfect intuition, a direct gnosis of reality. “All Obscurity will be clear to you,” says the tablet of this state of mind. The goal of alchemy is to make this golden moment permanent in a state of consciousness called the Philosopher’s Stone, and it all starts with the marriage of the opposites within.

In our drawing, the body of the alchemist is connected to the four elements. His feet protrude from behind the central emblem; one is on Earth and the other in Water. In his right hand is a torch of Fire and in his left a feather, symbolizing Air. Between his legs hangs the Cubic Stone labeled with the word *Corpus*, meaning body. The five stars surrounding it indicate that it also contains the hidden fifth element, the invisible Quintessence whose “inherent strength is perfected if it is turned into Earth.” Where the head of the alchemist should be, there is a strange winged caricature that is variously interpreted as a heart, a helmet, or even the pineal gland at the center of the brain. The symbol evolved from the Winged Disk of Akhenaten and became the top of the caduceus, the magical wand of Hermes where opposing energies merge to produce miracles. This knob represents the Ascended Essence, the essence of our souls raised to the highest level in the body—to the brain—where it becomes a mobile center of consciousness able to leave the body and travel to other dimensions of reality.

Touching the wings of the caduceus are a salamander engulfed in flames on the left side of the drawing and a standing bird on the right. Below the salamander is the inscription “Anima” (Soul); below the bird is the inscription “Spiritus” (Spirit). The salamander, as a symbol of soul, is attracted to and exposed in the blazing fire of the Sun. Likewise, the bird of spirit is attracted to the coolness of the Moon and is reflected in it. This is a subtle statement of the fundamental bipolar energies that drive the alchemy of transformation. Spiritus, Anima, and Corpus form a large inverted triangle

that stands behind the central emblem. Together they symbolize the three archetypal celestial forces that the alchemists termed Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt. Again, these are not chemicals at all, but our feelings, thoughts, and body.

Step One: Calcination

Now we can begin working through the Seven Stages of Transformation diagrammed in the drawing. The hidden matter with which we are going to work is the One Thing within people, our souls, which the great alchemist Paracelsus called the “Star in Man.” This secret star is depicted as rays which spin out from the alchemist at the center of the mandala. The shaded ray shooting downward to the Cubic Stone is labeled number one and represents both the beginning and end of the Great Work. This ray is also marked with the cipher that stands for both the metal lead and the planet Saturn. Saturn is the Ancient One, Old Man Time with his scythe and crutch. But Saturn is crippled for a reason: he is the slowest planet, and his metal, lead, is heavy and dull. Together they symbolize the soul’s inertia and weight, which produce the stubborn, materialistic, and melancholic temperament of lead. In relationships, the person from Saturn is passive-aggressive and likes to keep others waiting but can also be very loyal and family-oriented.

Nearest the alchemist in this shaded ray is the square symbol for Salt. The ancients sometimes associated common salt with thinking because of its property of crystallization. They believed thought was a living substance made of moving images that turned to salt when it entered man from the Above. Thus, salt represented stifled or lowered consciousness, which when raised through the operations of alchemy, dissolved and recrystallized into a higher form. This breakdown in crystallized thought (or altering of belief systems) is the primary objective of the first two operations of alchemy. To alchemists, the release through the eyes of dissolved salt in tears signified that Dissolution really broke down thoughts and feelings.

Moving clockwise in the drawing, we come to the first of seven circles containing scenes depicting the operations of alchemy. The first circle (located between the first and second rays) shows a black crow perching on top of a skull. Below it on the outer ring is inscribed the Latin word *Visita*,

meaning to visit or start a journey. This circle depicts the Soul Bird during the process of Calcination, in which everything lower has been burnt away. In chemical Calcination, a substance is heated over an open flame or in a crucible until it is reduced to ashes; this is the first application of the Fire element in the tablet.

In psychological terms, this is known as the Death of the Profane, an operation on the saturnine elements of the personality that results in the death of ego and extinction of interest in the material world as the soul realizes the illusions it has embraced. In other words, Calcination is the destruction of ego and all its defense mechanisms. These mechanisms usually take the form of self-perpetuating delusions and attachments to appearances and material possessions. In the worst case, a person's basest instincts are constellated in his or her psyche and given power over the entire personality. In such cases, a person must endure the most horrendous hellfire that eventually reduces one's life to shambles. Therefore, the intensity of the calcining fires varies between individuals, though Calcination always represents the beginning of a Black Stage in our lives when we are reduced to our most basic components, whether we are aware of it or not.

For most of us, Calcination is a natural process that takes place over time, as we are gradually assaulted and overcome by the trials and tribulations of life. But for the alchemists, Calcination is a controlled burn achieved by a deliberate surrender of our materiality through a variety of spiritual disciplines that ignite the passion in our souls. In all these instances, Calcination is working with Fire to burn away mental constructs and reveal a person's true essence.

Step Two: Dissolution

The second ray of the Azoth of the Philosophers points toward the king's domain and is marked with the symbol that stands for both the metal tin and the planet Jupiter. This ray is white or light gray in color. The person with a temperament of tin relies on his or her own judgment to guide them through life, although their assessments tend to be based on outward appearances. This reliance on superficial processes produces a practical, unemotional, and "tinny" temperament. In relationships, the person from Jupiter is likely to be

motivated by strictly physical cravings or monetary gain, yet he or she can also be a good provider for other family members.

The second circle depicts the black Soul Bird watching itself undergoing Dissolution, literally dissolving before its own eyes in the powerful forces of the unconscious. This internal “water which does not wet the hands” takes the form of dreams, voices, visions, and strange feelings which reveal a less ordered and less rational world existing simultaneously with our everyday life. Also reflecting back from the pool of Dissolution is the white image of the essence of the Soul Bird, which is exposed during this operation. In the outer ring next to the circle of Dissolution is the word *Interiora*, meaning the interior or innermost parts, the source of our emotions and feelings.

Dissolving the ashes of Calcination in water or acid is what the alchemists meant by Dissolution. Psychologically, this is the further breaking down of the artificial structures of the psyche by immersion in the unconscious or the unrational and rejected parts of our minds. “Its mother is the Moon” says the tablet, referring to the activation of lunar consciousness at this stage and the first application of the Water element described in the tablet. Just as Calcination works on the mind and ego to destroy deceptions and impure thoughts, so does Dissolution work on the heart and id to release buried emotions that conceal or distort our true nature. Basically, this means showing our pain and revealing our wounds, which is where the gold of our being is often trapped but still intact. It is, for the most part, an unconscious process in which our conscious mind allows the surfacing of previously buried material.

Dissolution is working with the Water element by opening our personal floodgates and generating new energy from the waters held back. It results in a wonderfully flowing presence that is free of inhibitions, prejudgments, and restrictive mental structures. That which is within us is now close to the surface and freely expressed.

Step Three: Separation

The third ray of the Azoth points toward the torch of Fire and is marked with the cipher signifying both the metal iron and the planet Mars. This ray is colored red and is also marked with a smaller symbol denoting Sulfur. The

iron individual is a willful, aggressive, and hot-tempered person whose actions are dominated by a conquering energy that turns everything toward himself or herself. Sulfur stands for the masculine, active force being expressed here. In relationships, the person from Mars is domineering and can even be abusive but can also fight for others with unquenchable passion.

The third circle shows the operation of Separation in which the black, earthbound Soul Bird splits into two white birds that descend to retrieve the saved remains of Calcination and Dissolution. This is the first coming together of soul and spirit, and the newly acquired vantage point allows the discernment of what is worthy of being saved from the previous two operations. In psychological terms, the process of Separation retrieves the frozen energy released from the breaking down of habits and crystallized thoughts (assumptions, beliefs, and prejudices) and hardened feelings (emotional blockages, neuroses, and phobias). This misspent energy is now available to drive our spiritual transformation. Above this circle is the written *Terrae*, which means “of the earth” and refers to the real essences and energy being separated out from the dregs of matter at this stage.

Alchemical Separation is the isolation of the components of Dissolution by filtration or settling and the discarding of ungentle or unworthy material. This is the rediscovery of our essence and the reclaiming of dream and visionary “gold” previously rejected by the masculine or rational part of our minds. It is, for the most part, a conscious process in which we review formerly unconscious material and decide what to discard and what to reintegrate into our personality. Much of this shadowy material consists of things we are ashamed of or have been taught to hide away by our parents, pastors, and teachers.

To summarize, Separation is letting go of the self-inflicted restraints to our true nature and saving the hidden essence, which becomes the subject of the following operations. That essence is made up of the best parts of our spirit and soul, our mind and heart. “The Wind carried it in its belly,” says the tablet, and this stage is the first application of the Air element in the Work. Separation delivers the retrieved spiritual essences safely through the processes of Calcination and Dissolution to its first incarnation, which is the earthly Conjunction.

Step Four: Conjunction

The fourth ray of the Azoth points to the area at the top of the drawing where the right wing of the Ascended Essence touches the salamander wallowing in flames. The ray is marked with the single symbol for both gold and the Sun and is often colored yellow or light green. The person with a golden temperament is courageous yet humble, full of spirit yet sensitive, and aware of the inner seed of radiance waiting to grow within everyone. This is the golden hue of the androgynous youth connected to both feeling and intellect. In relationships, the solar person tends to be very romantic and expects the same in return. In fact, the problem here is usually that the solar person is too idealistic and wants to stay anchored at this stage of development.

The fourth circle depicts the birds of soul and spirit leaving the earth together, lifting a five-spiked crown (the Quintessence recovered from the preceding operations) into heaven or the realm of the One Mind. This Conjunction is the turning point of the whole alchemical process and denotes the change from the forces of the Anima (Soul) on the left to the forces of the Spiritus (Spirit) on the right. Above this circle is inscribed the word *Rectificando*, which means “by rectification” or setting things right, and the wings of the Ascended Essence spread over this operation as if to bless it.

On the personal level, Conjunction is the empowerment of our true selves, the union of both the masculine and feminine sides of our personalities into a new belief system that must still be nurtured to survive. The alchemists described this fragile child as a crude hermaphrodite, but as it grows in strength, the Child of the Philosophers solidifies into the Lesser Stone, a state of consciousness in which the initiate is able to clearly discern what needs to be done to achieve lasting enlightenment. This Lesser Stone is often equated with the Emerald Tablet itself, which every one of us must create anew within.

For many, the Conjunction experience is felt as an increase in intuitive insight—what Egyptian alchemists called the birth of the Intelligence of the Heart. This newly found faculty produces a sense of reality superior to either thought or feeling. As if to herald the viability of this new state of being, synchronicities begin to occur that confirm the alchemist is on the right track.

Conjunction can be seen as the creation of an intuitive “overself” and the achievement of what Carl Jung named individuation, in which the fragmented self is reunified into the original whole. The creation of this harmonious, whole person means we have risen as far as we can on the earthly plane. “Its nurse is the Earth” is how this important stage is described in the tablet, and it represents the first application of the Earth element in the Work.

Step Five: Fermentation

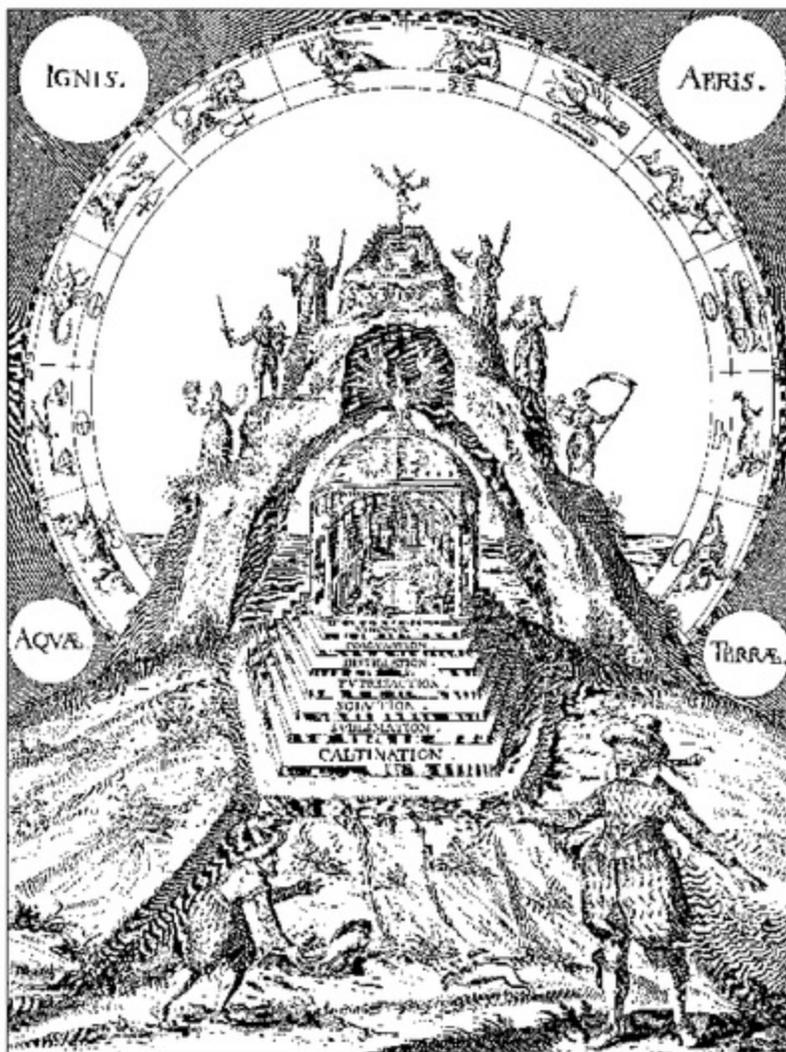
The fifth ray of the Azoth points to the area where the left wing of the Ascended Essence touches the standing bird of Spirit. The ray is marked with the cipher for the metal copper and the planet Venus. This section is often colored turquoise or green, which is associated with the Quintessence of the Emerald Tablet, or what the Sufis call the Emerald Vision. The person with a cupric temperament is sanguine and ruled by the blood humor. Relationships with people from Venus are as romantic as those from Mars but in a giving way and with greater substance to offer. This is the ray of the inspired Spiritual Warrior, the alchemical adept who has seen the way and wants to tell others of his or her discovery and to spread his vision of higher consciousness throughout the world.

The fifth circle is under the inscription *Invenies*, which means “you will discover.” This is the operation of Fermentation in which the mystic substance forms the ambrosia of the gods, which represents the first solidification of the result of the conjoining of soul and spirit. The circled drawing shows the Soul and Spirit birds nesting in a tree, brooding over their egg, waiting for the mystical event to occur. Having achieved earthly balance and poise during the Conjunction, the alchemist looks to the Above for the next phase of his transformation. Fermentation is the introduction of new life into the product of Conjunction to completely change its characteristics—that is, to completely raise it to a new level of being. The tablet tells us to leave the earthly realm by the fire of imagination, “gently and with great ingenuity” into a state that sets our soul afire with divine passion and inspiration. This is the second or higher application of the Fire element in the tablet, and the alchemists thought of it as working with the higher or heavenly Sulfur.

The overwhelming power from the Above can take many forms. It can be

a mystical experience, religious awakening, near-death experience, psychic vision, paranormal encounter, the achievement of grace in sports, or simply a winning attitude in business. Fermentation is achieved through a number of activities that include deep meditation, intense prayer, strong desire, breakdown of the personality, transpersonal therapy, activated imagination, continuous contemplation, or even the shamanic use of psychotropic drugs. In all cases, however, Fermentation is accomplished through what alchemists called the True Imagination, a state of consciousness in which mental images or visions seem more representative of reality than anything that we can see with our eyes. It is as if our consciousness has left the bounds of matter and exists outside our bodies, and everything we experience in this state is more real and more truthful than the everyday world.

This transcendent phase is a final initiation of the personality into a new milieu that begins with the Putrefaction of the hermaphroditic child from the Conjunction resulting in its death in the Below in the world of illusion and its resurrection in the Above in the light of truth. “Initiation essentially aims to go beyond the possibilities of the individual human state,” wrote philosopher Rene Guenon in *Glimpses of Initiation*, “to make possible the transition to higher states and finally to lead the individual beyond any limitations whatsoever.”



The Cave of the Ancients showing a deliberately deceptive order of operations. (Stefan Michel Spacher, Cabala: Spiegel der Kunst und Natur in Alchymia, Frankfort 1616)

The alchemical initiation, which is the Fermentation process, relies on the inspiration of spiritual power that reanimates, energizes, and enlightens the alchemist. The alchemist literally feels “on fire,” but unlike the harsh fires of Calcination which attacked ego, the gentle warmth of Fermentation works on the spiritual child of the Conjunction just like a brooding hen sitting on its eggs. The “hatching” of the new state of consciousness is often marked by a brilliant display of colors and meaningful visions called the “Peacock’s Tail,” which heralds the end of alchemy’s tortuous Black Stage. Out of the blackness of the alchemist’s Putrefaction comes the yellow Ferment, which

“flows like a golden wax” in his brain. Chinese alchemists referred to this as the Golden Pill, which signifies the beginning of true enlightenment, the Yellow Stage of alchemy. This golden, waxy substance is the literal incarnation of thought. It is the product of our True Imagination becoming real.

So, Fermentation is flooding the mind with meaningful and profoundly real images from something totally beyond us that lies at the edge of our personal reality. It is like a swinging door between one level of consciousness and another, between soul and spirit, between matter and mind.

Step Six: Distillation

The Azoth’s sixth ray points to the feather, symbol of Air and the process of spiritualization. This ray is associated with the color indigo or lapis blue with gold specks in it. It is marked with the symbol for the metal and planet Mercury, as well as an identical smaller symbol indicating the heavenly element of Mercury. A mercurial temperament means a flighty person, whose moods and behavior do not seem tied to any earthly explanation. Relationships with people from Mercury are always changing. They can be totally attentive and sensitive one minute and totally self-involved in the next. They need Distillation to fix their aspirations and gain perspective in their relationships.

The sixth circle shows a unicorn lying on the ground in front of a rose bush. According to legend, the unicorn runs tirelessly from pursuers but lies meekly on the ground when approached by a virgin. In this case, the virgin is the purified alchemist, who has returned to a state of innocence through the release and purification of emotions. Above the circle is the word *Occultum*, meaning secret or hidden. This circle represents the Distillation operation in which the purified soul will behold its object and peer into the eye of God. To do so demands the utmost purification which repeated distillations symbolize.

Chemically, distillation is the boiling and condensation of the fermented solution to increase its purity, which is why this is known as the White Stage of alchemy. Psychologically, this agitation and sublimation of psychic forces is necessary to ensure that no impurities from the ego or id are incorporated into the next and final process. “It rises from Earth to Heaven and descends

again to Earth” is how the tablet describes this operation, which represents the second or higher application of the Water element in the tablet. The alchemists thought of this phase as working with the heavenly element Mercury to extract and refashion the metals. The Ferment, the soft amalgam or balsam resulting from this operation, must be hardened into a Stone before it can be made permanent, and the final phase of Distillation is a sublimation in which the vapor turns solid, or the spirit is made corporeal.

For the modern adept, Distillation consists of a variety of introspective techniques that attempt to raise the content of the psyche to the highest level possible, free from all sentimentality and emotions, cut off even from one’s personal identity. Distillation takes us into the rarefied realm of the One Mind where base emotions cannot follow. It is the purification of the unborn Self—all that we truly are and can be spiritually. “When the soul reaches the perfection of the Spirit, having been completely purified from passion, and is joined and commingled with the Holy Spirit,” said the fourth-century Coptic mystic Macarius, “then it becomes all light, all exaltation, all heartfelt love.”

Step Seven: Coagulation

The seventh ray of the Azoth points to the realm of the queen and contains the symbol which stands for both the metal silver and the Moon. This ray is either colored purple, indicating royalty, or silvery gray, representing the Moon. The lunar or silver temperament is feminine and reflective, with a personality that tends to be volatile and manifested on multiple levels. This type of person needs outside influences to come truly alive. In relationships with the lunar person, you end up doing most of the talking, but still waters run deep, and the lunar lover is sensuously supportive.

The final, seventh circle shows an androgynous youth emerging from an open grave, with the Latin word *Lapidem*, meaning “the Stone,” next to it. This is the stage of Coagulation, in which the fermented Soul Child of the Conjunction is fused with the sublimated spiritual presence of Distillation. The resurrection of the soul is accomplished by bringing together only the purest essence of our bodies or matter into the light of meditation and reflection on life experiences. It becomes a permanent and always available state of consciousness that embodies the highest aspirations and evolution of

mind and is sensed as a new strength of personality to survive any onslaught. In the mystical sense, this “returns again to Earth” is the realization of the eternal spirit body, often confirmed in an out-of-body experience.

The alchemists referred to this mobile state of consciousness as the Philosopher’s Stone or Greater Stone, which is achieved first only in hypnagogic and semidream states and eventually becomes solidified light that seems more real than our physical bodies. At that point, the alchemist has entered the final Red Stage and can use this wonderful presence to transform the reality of everything around him. The alchemists promised that from this Stone would flow the red Elixir that heals all wounds and cures all diseases.

In other words, Coagulation incarnates and releases the *Ultima Materia* of the soul that the Emerald Tablet described as the “Glory of the Whole Universe.” Literally, according to the tablet, it is “the greatest Force of all powers, because it overcomes every Subtle thing and penetrates every Solid thing.” Coagulation is the second or higher application of the elements Air and Earth in the tablet, and it results in a union of spirit with matter. At this stage, the alchemists felt they were working with the heavenly element of Salt.

However, there is yet another step in our mandala, which is the eighth step mentioned by Hermes and other mystics. It is depicted in the Azoth drawing as the return to the first ray, the ray of Salt and Saturn that points to the Cubic Stone. For at the end of the alchemical process, we arrive back where we started from, only now empowered and embodied in an eternal Stone that represents an incorruptible higher consciousness.

There is one last message hidden in the Azoth drawing. All the Latin words contained in the outer ring that connects the rays of transformation spell out a summary of what has taken place: *Visita Interiora Terrae Rectificando Invenies Occultum Lapidem*. This means “Visit the innermost parts of the earth; by setting things right, you will find the hidden Stone.” The first letter of these seven Latin words spells out the Hermetic word VITRIOL. Vitriol is the first of the arcana, which are secret chemicals in a laboratory experiment that summarizes the entire process of transformation. Acidic Vitriol is the fiery liquid energy that drives physical transmutation and becomes the brain ambrosia or hormone that brings on the materialization of spirit in man.

By recognizing and working with the forces of alchemy, anyone can not

only tap into hidden sources of creative power but fundamentally transform themselves and their life situations. The seven-stepped Emerald Formula, summarized in the phrase *Solve et Coagula* (“Dissolve and Coagulate”), is the driving force behind our physical, psychological, and spiritual lives, and by directly applying it— by beginning the Great Work within ourselves—we can change our reality on all levels. In the following seven chapters, we will learn how to master each step of the Emerald Formula and transmute each of the hidden metals of our being into gold.

1 From an early translation of *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, Tractate 6 of Codex VI in the Nag Hammadi Library. A discussion of the Hermetic initiation can be found in L.S. Keizer, ed., *The Eighth Reveals the Ninth: A New Hermetic Initiation Discourse* (Seaside, California: Academy of Arts and Humanities, 1974). A short summary also appears in an excellent article by Stephan Hoeller, “On the Trail of the Winged God: Hermes and Hermeticism Throughout the Ages,” in *Gnosis: A Journal of Western Inner Traditions* (Issue 40, Summer 1996).



Chapter 11 CALCINATION: BURNING OF THE DROS

The Fire-Breathing Dragon

The first of the seven operations of alchemy is Calcination, the heating and pulverization of a solid to drive off water and other volatile compounds. What is left is a small pile of desiccated white ashes, and the alchemists referred to this process of reduction as the “Fire-Breathing Dragon who drinks the water.” Since moisture and volatility are symbolic of the libido and emotions, the alchemists were acknowledging a basic fact of the human condition: As we mature and are heated by the natural forces of existence, we tend to lose contact with our own life force. The older we get and the more “adulterated” we become, the less psychic energy we have available. By middle age, many people feel they have lost a precious part of themselves and are leading inauthentic and unproductive lives. Our souls have despaired trying to survive in a world of spiritual drought.

The basic problem is that we identify with our superficial personalities, not our true essences, and we invest all our energy in our egos, which are artificial constructs. In other words, we spend our life force trying to animate Frankenstein monsters that were never meant to live. That is why life for most human beings is one assault on their ego after another, and the more we try to enhance or enshrine our egos, the more insult we suffer. Decline of self-esteem, embarrassment, failure to be loved, loss of material possessions, and all the other harsh realities of life gradually crucify our pampered egos. Yet all those bad, uncomfortable things just might be good for us if they burn away ego and slap us back into the reality of Self. In many ways, the fires of hell experienced in Calcination are beneficial because they expose deeper layers of our essence while rubbing away the false person. In the words of poet T. S. Eliot, we are “redeemed from fire by fire.”

The feelings we experience during this purification of the soul are rage,

anger, and frustration. As we have seen, those fiery emotions ruled for many years in the life of William Shatner, whose single-minded striving to become the world's greatest actor stunted his growth as a person. The same thing happened to me, when I dedicated myself to a worldly goal and tried to ignore everything else.

My Calcination: Unmasking False Gods

In order to become a good mathematician, one not only has to work with complicated formulae and expressions, but one has to work with them *fast*. In the days before computers, that meant scribbling across blackboards with breakneck speed, surrounded by chips of chalk flying off in all directions. Why this ability was the hallmark of a mathematician had as much to do with arrogance as it did with knowing the material cold. Mathematics was the queen of the sciences, the language of nature, and the faster one could do it, the more the mind approached the lightning speed of the Great Mathematician himself—God. In fact, I soon discovered that as long as one was breaking chalk at a frantic pace, most professors did not even bother to check the work.

I studied mathematics because I was searching for the shortest path to objective truth. Looking back, it was an extremely pompous approach to life, and the real reason I devoted all my time to mathematics was probably that I did not want to sink any further into the quagmire of the human condition. I had discovered that if I became proficient at thinking, I could avoid feeling anything, because thinking comes faster than feeling. To feel things, one has to slow down and give feelings time to surface, and I was determined never to let buried feelings catch up with me. There were no rules for dealing with the chaos of emotions, and as a youth, I sensed that the maelstrom of feelings could easily overcome me. The abstract world of mathematics was like a life buoy that kept me afloat above everyone else.

My neat little world started to unravel during the Christmas break in 1971, while I was still in graduate school at the University of Vienna. With three fellow students, I decided to take a skiing holiday in Innsbruck in the

Austrian Alps. By the time we arrived by train, we had spent most of our money on snacks and beer and did not have much left for lift tickets. Short of cash, we ended up cross-country skiing over the Nordketten Range between Innsbruck and Kitzbühl. There, in the middle of the afternoon, we came upon what appeared to be a shimmering metallic disk hovering in a ravine. As we approached it, it appeared to spin faster and then darted away without a sound. Compared to many such incidents, it was not a very spectacular sighting, and we immediately started rationalizing what happened. We even took perfunctory measurements of the angle of the sun to prove to ourselves that it just was an optical illusion caused by a reflection off the glazed snow bank above us.

Maybe it was just excitement, but what bothered me most about the incident was an odd burning sensation in my gut that felt like I was somehow “fueling” what was happening. The next day we realized that Europe was in the midst of a flurry of UFO sightings centered in the Austrian Alps, and I began to wonder if we had in some way precipitated the event through our unconscious expectations. Though I never believed we encountered an extraterrestrial craft, the experience was more than just a hallucination. I was certain we actually participated in whatever physical phenomenon happened in that ravine.

I joined an international UFO research organization when I got back to Vienna, and after I returned to the United States, I became a mathematics consultant and field investigator for four different national groups. I was convinced there was a human solution to the UFO problem that could yield valuable scientific data about the relationship between consciousness and reality. I opened an office, set up a twenty-four-hour, toll-free hotline to accumulate reports nationwide, and created a computer database for statistical studies. In order to help initiate a scientific dialog on the subject, I founded an academic quarterly called the *Journal of Ufology* and accepted the position as the founding editor for the *MUFON UFO Journal*. I soon became a respected researcher and even helped draft a proclamation calling for an international UFO agency that was presented to the General Assembly of the United Nations by the prime minister of Grenada.

Unfortunately, all these public efforts were totally irrelevant to what was really going on, and I, like everyone else in the field, ended up just trying to make a career for myself. The UFO problem was more complicated than just

hardware from space and contained a unique link to human consciousness that none of us knew how to deal with. There was no discipline, certainly no scientific method, for dealing with this kind of phenomenon. So, when I was invited to move to New York City and take over as editor of *Official UFO* and *Ancient Astronauts*, both newsstand magazines with nearly a half-million readers, I jumped at the chance.

In the New York publishing world, I submerged myself in a lifestyle built around even quicker thinking than in mathematics, and it seemed to suit me. I settled into a fast-paced life, commuting to Manhattan from a house on the ocean and hobnobbing with media moguls. In my spare time, I consulted on several Hollywood films and lectured throughout North America.

I had not given up entirely on finding something truthful to say about UFOs, and for that reason, I frequently butted heads with my publisher. I tried to run authenticated photos and stories and even published articles by debunkers and scientists. Although circulation had gone up while I was editor, the publisher was always looking for figures in the range of those in the *National Enquirer*. Then, one day, he and the receptionist got together and came up with a story even the *Enquirer* would have thought twice about running. The publisher insisted on printing a fake letter on the cover of *Official UFO* from a Connecticut housewife saying she had been raped by extraterrestrials and suspected her son was an alien. When I realized he was serious and not going to retract the story, I switched the photo of the model of a housewife on the cover with a picture of my own sister, so I could prove it was all faked. Then I sent out over a hundred news releases announcing that the July 1977 cover story in *Official UFO* was a lie.

My publisher was not amused. He immediately fired me then had me arrested for using company postage to send out the news releases. The case was thrown out by the municipal court, after which I sued my publisher for false arrest and defamation of character. Unfortunately, the scandal had already ruined my reputation, and court fees and endless legal maneuvering gradually ate up my resources. My once healthy ego shattered with the muffled sound of bundles of *Official UFO* hitting the newsstands. Everything in my life suddenly went to pieces, and I was forced into bankruptcy. In desperate need of a job, I took a position as an engineering supervisor at a gypsum plant. I had wasted years of singleminded study to end up working at a job that required only a minimum of common sense.

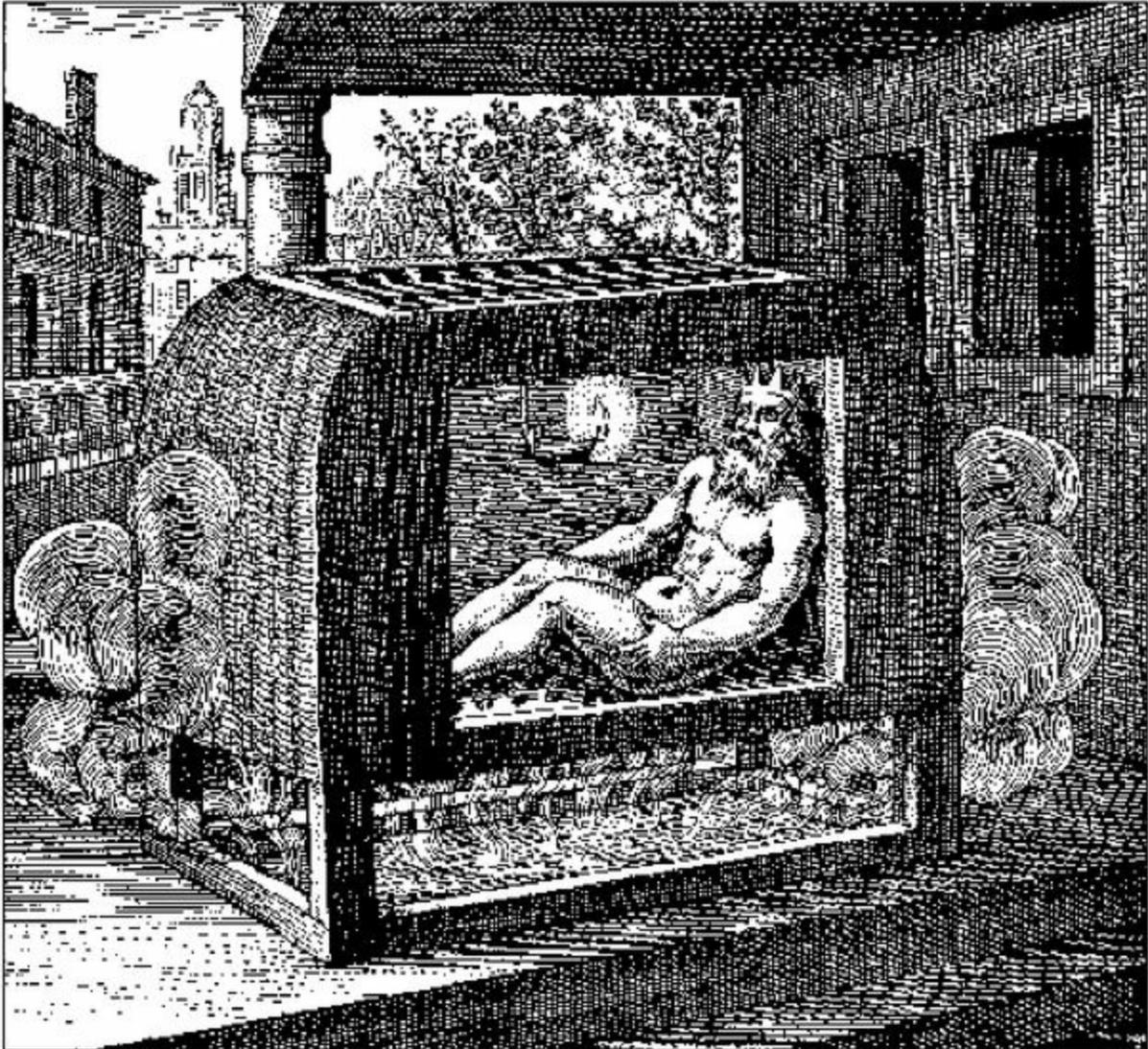
The encounter with a UFO proved my undoing. It had tricked me into abandoning my lofty scientific goals and left me part of the sleaziest of worlds. I was bitter, angry, and bereft of ambition. As if to mirror what was taking place in my own soul, I transferred to a gypsum plant in the middle of the Nevada desert, a place of barren rocks where everything else had been burnt away by the relentless sun. After only a few weeks, I found a new job in a gold mine. Like the faceless workers in the 1,800-foot-deep vertical shaft, I had no choice but to keep going deeper to see if there was anything left of value. Surprisingly, in the scorched silence of the desert and the cool blackness of the mine, I uncovered traces of true gold in the empty vessel of my ego, and it began a process to retrieve that incorruptible essence which continues to this day.

Overthrowing the Tyrant King

As I had discovered in my own life, there is no escape from the fires of Calcination until we are able to identify with what psychologists call the transpersonal Self, which in alchemy is known as the Philosopher's Stone. Only the Stone can survive the Dragon's Breath, the fires of the hell we all make for ourselves. There is no room for two rulers of the personality, and only by destroying the ego can the Stone manifest itself. Calcination is truly the "death of the profane," the sacrifice of specious ego concerns for a higher level of being that is a necessary condition for spiritual advancement and understanding. During this initial stage of personal alchemy, the extravagances and illusions we have built up over the course of our lives are eliminated. This is the first step a mystic takes when he gives up all his possessions or goes to a mountaintop to meditate. Physical possessions, however, are not the real problem. Rather, it is the significance we give them and our attitude toward the world that is in error. By burning away all that is not relevant, we get a better picture of our true situation in an existential sense.

In simplest terms, the purpose of personal Calcination is the suppression and taming of ego. The ego must be buried in the white purified ash created

by the emotions of the libido intensifying and burning themselves out. In this way, the ego king (the former ruling principle of the psyche) is sacrificed for the good of the whole personality. As in a pagan fertility ritual, the dead king is sacrificed so his spirit will multiply like grain and be reborn for the good of the whole community.



*The king suffers through Calcination in the sweatbox of his own thoughts.
(Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfort 1617)*

How much control does the “tyrant king” have over our life? The answer is in how much energy is spent defending him. The more energy it takes, the bigger the ego, because it is artificial and has no life of its own. The ego is a

parasite on one's life force and has nothing to do with the real Self. We should ask ourselves how easily embarrassed we are or how much effort is put into covering up our mistakes. Are others blamed when things go wrong? How upset do we get when things don't go our way? All are ego reactions. Do physical appearance or material possessions add to the character of a person? They are merely physical accouterments that can disappear overnight. Our egos interfere with the expression of our true Selves by focusing attention on physical attributes and material possessions.

The longer we live, the more obvious it becomes that ego is an unnatural affectation doomed to a slow and painful death. Struggle though we might, we will never be able to satisfy the cravings of ego. One of William Shatner's favorite wisecracks goes: "If you want to get screwed, just tell your plans to God." Lamentably, it sometimes takes a lifetime to realize *why* we are getting screwed by life. Calcination is really a very natural process, and whether we are always aware of it or not, every event in our lives exists to expose yet another layer of our true essence. How can we hasten the natural process of ego annihilation and move on to a genuine life? What will it take to burn us up? The answer is very simple: we must do *whatever* it takes to get in touch with the individual essence that each of us has suppressed to make room for ego. Ignore ego and pay attention only to essence. That essence is the source of life that must grow like a fire and consume all traces of ego. Out of those ashes grows the true Self.

Roasting Cinnabar

For many millennia human beings have been engaging in an activity that is designed specifically to contact the essence of Self. Meditation is the art of turning attention inward without regard to the demands of the external world, to move beyond ego and achieve union with our spiritual core. "All things have come from this One Thing," says the Emerald Tablet, "through the meditation of One Mind." However, alchemistic meditation is different from other forms in that it is an active instead of a passive discipline. The alchemist's meditation seeks to actually *work* with the powers beyond ego to

create something new. The object is not to still the mind but to fill it with archetypal images and follow those visions back to their source. Obviously, the most important component of this type of meditation is the power of inspired imagination—what the alchemists called True Imagination. They understood True Imagination to be the real and literal power to create meaningful images in the mind, as opposed to fantasy. True Imagination is the evocation of inner images: it does not spin groundless fantasies but tries to portray them true to their archetypal nature.

One method to get in touch with our True Imagination and use it in our own Calcination is a meditation session called “Roasting Cinnabar.” Known as “Dragon’s Blood,” cinnabar is a naturally occurring mineral, a brilliant red sulfide of mercury that the ancients thought was magic. If the rocks are roasted over an open flame, drops of pure mercury ooze from the crevices and fall into the ashes with heavy thuds. If cinnabar is ground up and heated in a glass container, the mercury condenses on the side of the glass like a mirror. Early Chinese, Islamic, and Jewish alchemists were convinced they had discovered the First Matter during the Calcination of cinnabar rocks. The elemental mercury produced by roasting cinnabar has all the characteristics of what the alchemists thought the First Matter should look like. It has the heavy, watery qualities of the One Thing from which the universe was created. Like the primal chaos of the One Thing, mercury has no form of its own. Mercury is the only metal that is liquid at room temperature, and because other metals liquefy at higher temperatures, mercury is said to possess the soul of all metals and is their precursor. When heated, even at the most mild temperatures, mercury releases a thick vapor or “spirit.”

Since mercury was thought to contain a masculine spirit and a feminine soul, alchemists considered it hermaphroditic—that is, containing the traits of both Hermes and Aphrodite. Furthermore, mercury takes the shape of any container yet forms solid amalgams when mixed with other metals. Thus, liquid mercury is capable of being “fixed” into a solid form, just like the One Thing when acted on by the One Mind. Like the primeval substance which is the source of all creation, mercury catches light and reflects images and has the quality of being alive, which is why it was called the “living silver,” or quicksilver. While mercury is the ideal symbol for the First Matter, it turned out that it was not the primordial material itself. Chinese alchemists spent centuries creating mercury pills in the search for the elixir of life, yet the only

immortality they achieved came after they poisoned themselves taking the compounds they created. Still, mercury became a powerful philosophical current in the deep and slow moving river of alchemy.

The object of the Roasting Cinnabar meditation is to probe the hardened red mass of reactionary judgments and buried assumptions that are hidden but still responsible for much of our behavior. The meditation begins by entering a relaxed state in which you divorce yourself from the strivings and concerns of ego. Some experienced meditators know how to elicit this relaxation response almost automatically by saying the same word or phrase over and over until the ego is literally bored into submission. Others use rhythmic breathing techniques that entrain the body and mind into a relaxed state. No matter what method is used, it takes a concerted effort to totally relax and break free of the concerns of the everyday world.

Here is the process: Start out sitting in a comfortable chair or lying propped up by cushions on a bed or couch. Slowly count back from ten, and with each count, take a slower and fuller breath while progressively relaxing every part of the body—starting with the toes and working up to the scalp muscles. Then try to visualize the bright red cinnabar roasting over a blazing fire, and think back over your life to its most embarrassing or angriest moments. Try to dredge up the thoughts and feelings that were experienced then because they are directly tied to the ego's momentary loss of control. Those experiences are still there hidden inside the red rock. The ego buried them there.

As you think back, you know you are getting close if you start to feel uncomfortable or upset. It may be necessary to turn up the heat and gather all your willpower to stay focused on these inglorious memories, but there is a reason. In the meditative state, you are temporarily divorced from ego and can clearly see the follies and injustices of ego-centered existence. You quickly discover that the ego is entirely a reactive adaptation designed to perpetuate illusion. Perhaps you loved someone who did not love you back, or you tried to help someone and only ended up making things worse, or you hurt a beloved pet or a close friend out of anger. Maybe someone took advantage of you or made a fool of you. We all have had such denigrating experiences, and sometimes because of them, we “get burned” and silently promise never to let those things happen again. Our egos go to extreme lengths to get even or to never allow the opportunity for such humiliations to

take place again. As we have already noted, the alchemists saw those kinds of reactionary, hardened thoughts as “metals” within us and believed they made up our individual temperaments.

However, those searing thoughts are part of the energy that drives our lives, and if we bury them, we surrender life force. When those ignoble thoughts become bound to our personalities, our behavior is based on encrusted patterns of response that turn us into ego-driven zombies. There is no simple formula like “from now on I will be more loving” or “starting Monday I will be more open with my coworkers.” That type of planning and goal setting is the hallmark of ego. All we can do is become aware of our hidden assumptions and everyday thoughts and witness how we turn control of our lives over to the most insubstantial part within us.

After working through one or two of these egotistic memories, keep the fires of introspection burning and try to hold onto the original thoughts while visualizing the hot mercury seeping out of the roasting cinnabar. Don’t let go of those thoughts as you visualize yourself catching the mercury in a glass bottle as it oozes from the rocks. What you are holding is the fabled genie-in-a-bottle, the power of liquefied, free-flowing thought. This is purified thought, still warm to the touch and uncontaminated by ego. You can use it to get anything you want by refashioning it into the light of the living imagination.

Working with Fire

The light of the True Imagination has as its source the fiery consciousness of a person undergoing transformation. These fires are fanned by an intense desire to seek only truth, and, if we do not ignite them under our own control, they will erupt by the spontaneous combustion of the psychological garbage we carry with us. Controlled transformation begins by setting the fires in the crucible of soul through alchemistic meditation. That is why the alchemists were known as Fire Philosophers: they sought to consume themselves in spiritual flames so that they might find something eternal by revealing their purest components. Their furnace or athanor was the human body, where the

metals, as hardened thoughts and emotions, were cooked through the various stages of perfection within the hermetically sealed vessel of mind. Without this fire of consciousness, of heightened awareness and concentrated imagination which joins body, soul, and spirit, alchemy cannot work. Only by turning up the heat can we hope to digest or burn away the unassimilated bits of thought (habits, phobias, neuroses, complexes) that block the flow of psychic energy within us—energy that can be more productively applied to fuel our spiritual transformation.

Like all the processes in alchemy, Calcination has an unspoken component which is usually expressed in the form of strange-looking drawings, emblems, and diagrams. These enigmatic figures contain subliminal messages that speak directly to our unconscious minds, and the alchemists spent many hours creating and meditating on them. Through the pioneering work of psychiatrist Carl Jung, we now know that these alchemical images convey archetypal meanings that transcend time, space, and culture.

Images of Calcination include skulls, funeral pyres, hell or purgatory, torture, crucifixion, birds rising from flames, and confrontations with ravens, imps, dragons, or devils. Dream scenarios involve “wasting away” in a fever, being lost in a desert, or being eaten alive by a parent or by animals such as the Gray Wolf (base instincts) or the Red Lion (the unredeemed personality). Tarot cards are full of alchemical imagery, and the trump card corresponding to Calcination is the Fool, who carries the First Matter with him in his knapsack and does not even know it. Alchemical engravings at this stage show the king being boiled alive, cremated, or sitting inside a sweat box or sealed retort. Sometimes this phase is represented by the Sun and Moon roasting over flames. The classic symbol of Calcination is the salamander that lives in fire. Perhaps the association arose when early alchemists noticed lizards scurrying in and out from under bonfires as the cold-blooded creatures sought warmth beneath the burning logs. In any case, the idea took hold that salamanders were born in the fire and frolicked in its flames. That was a powerful analogy for the perfected being who would be exposed and survive in the fires of Calcination.

When applied psychologically, the element of Fire, or heightened consciousness, is one of the most powerful forces for transformation at our disposal. Whether expressed as sheer willpower or somatically as a purifying

heat in our bodies, this Fire is the ultimate agent of change. The following describes how a forty-year-old patient of San Francisco psychotherapist Dr. Ralph Metzner recalled his experience with Fire.

I was studying ancient alchemy at the time and imagery from that tradition began to take on reality. The concept of matter being the densest, darkest aspect of God's light became very real, and I suddenly became aware of an energy blockage just below my belly button in my spine. It was like something tangible was building up there, and I went to a massage therapist and requested that he aggressively massage that area. During the therapy, not just dark, but black, hard, dense, old, putrid, rotten material seemed to emerge from this place on my spine and flowed throughout my body. This contamination of my body was being released. It felt like base metal—gross, hard, and black.

After my experience with the massage therapist, I decided to follow the steps of alchemy further and bring the purifying Philosopher's Fire to this place of contamination and intensely heat the "material" so as to transform it. I was ripe for this and experienced something like fire but not fire. It was like a fire of consciousness: bright, white, hot, intense, and eternally burning—like the center of the sun. The dark, dense matter blocking my spine became white-hot; the impenetrable vault was being transformed by heat; its structure was being destroyed. All the details of my past had become condensed and packed into my body, and it was now all simultaneously being broken up in a blazing bonfire created by the heat of pure consciousness.

Still now, but particularly for many days afterwards, my emotional reaction to ordinary events was and will always be different. The next day I was able to release pain that had been blocked inside me for many years, by crying in a way that I don't remember ever doing. I also reexperienced the fire; it began to burn again spontaneously, continuing the process. I am still assimilating the material previously released, and I can still feel the fire glowing as it moves up my spine. Changes in myself and in people I am involved with have been accelerated somehow. I don't compromise my feelings as much as I did previously, and I am in touch with them to

an infinitely greater extent.¹

After years of suffering from lack of energy and confidence, relief came for Dr. Metzner's patient only after he started applying methods from alchemy to burn away mental and physical contamination that the alchemists viewed as a buildup of base metals in a person. In order to turn up the heat in our life, we have to focus the light of consciousness inward in an unrelenting and completely honest inspection of our past and present behavior. This can take place in the normal course of the day as we try to be aware of the ego and its tricks or in a session of alchemistic meditation when we can be alone.

Cauldron of the Metals

If we do not refine our thoughts in the light of reflected consciousness and meditation, they materialize and block the natural flow of life force in our bodies, as in the case of Dr. Metzner's patient. Most adults are chronic sufferers from this affliction, and several alchemistic exercises are designed to refine the metals and change our temperaments. For alchemists, thoughts are manifested not only in the mind but in the body and nature too.

The consciousness-altering "Bellows Breath" is one of these active meditations. In this exercise, the alchemist sits cross-legged on the floor and tries to focus his energy at the navel or birth point. The breath is very rapid, continuous and powerful with no pause between inhaling and exhaling. The rate is about two exhalations per second. As he exhales, he pushes out the air like a bellows by pulling the navel point in toward the spine. When he inhales, he uses a forward thrust of the navel to bring air into the lungs. He tries to keep a smooth, balanced breath with no emphasis on either the taking in or expulsion of air. After a few minutes of "fanning the fire," he starts to feel a warmth rise from the stomach and accumulate in the head. Sometimes practitioners report being able to see the shining Quintessence within if they close their eyes after about three minutes of performing this strenuous exercise.

After about five minutes, most people experience a "blunting of the ego" which is the final goal for many yogis. If we try to stop at this point, there is a

bouncing or spilling sensation as the metallic energy returns to the cauldron at the base of the spine. If we continue, the fluid warmth of the living Mercury rises from that area into the head and then spreads slowly to other locations in the body. We should use this opportunity to experience the rising energy without making any assumptions or judgments about what is going on. We simply feel the energy of pure thought and how it seems to follow the nervous system to different areas of the body. Aside from releasing knots of trapped energy along the spine, the Bellows Breath has health benefits, such as oxygenating the blood and cleansing toxins, and regular practice quickly expands lung capacity. The Bellows Breath combines the elements of Fire and Air, which is a powerful spiritizing combination of alchemical forces.

Another moving meditation for Calcination is the “Dance of Sulfur.” Sulfur is a yellow powder which, when ignited, burns with a biting odor and leaves behind a red, plastic-looking residue. The alchemists believed it embodied the active, masculine principle of creation, and sulfuric acid (vitriol) was the driving force in most of their experiments. The Dance of Sulfur is an aerobic exercise designed to increase the metabolic rate and use the fiery energy to loosen metallic blockages along the entire frame of the body. The basic movement is an aerobic workout to rock-beat music. Any aerobic routine, like jogging in place or in a circle, which raises the heart rate for at least twenty minutes can be used. Other possibilities include fast dancing, stepping in place, or skipping rope. The idea is to increase the heart rate and metabolism so that the physical exertion temporarily knocks the concerns of ego out of the picture and we can focus entirely on the state of the body. At this point of empty-mindedness, we start visualizing fiery energy rising up in waves from below. This can be accomplished by imagining we are running over hot coals or pretending that if we run fast enough we can fly. The theory behind this exercise is that, without the interference of ego, body energy more easily follows thought. We can focus our attention on the sensation of heat rising up and direct that energy to tensed-up or problem areas in the body. We can also visualize the melting away of hardened metallic blockages while maintaining the aerobic pace.

The Calcined Person

Before undergoing Calcination, people are stubborn, self-centered, materialistic, fearful, and neurotic. About the only positive quality that can be found in such a person is a certain practicality and prudence that comes from having their dreams repeatedly squashed. How does one who has gone through the process of Calcination appear to the outside world? He or she has gained respect for the powerful hidden forces within and has lost respect for the transient and illusory forces outside. The calcined person no longer approaches the world through the pulpit of ego but instead has discovered the preeminence of the One Thing within, at the tabernacle of the Soul, from which springs active participation in the course of one's life. Other people often describe being in the presence of a calcined person as "refreshing." They sense the freedom of no longer having to be concerned about being manipulated or controlled by the deceits of someone's ego. It is like being in a garden where everything is growing healthily and naturally, and everyone benefits by just being there. Personal Calcination produces the humility that people find endearing in actors like Gary Cooper, Jimmy Stewart, and Tom Hanks.

The alchemists believed their operations took place on all levels of reality and looked to the stars for further confirmation of the Doctrine of Correspondences. The symbol they assigned to the process of Calcination was the ram horns of the constellation of Aries. This Fire sign originated in ancient Egypt with the ram-headed sun god Amen, whose powers even then were associated with the emergence and assertion of ego. Astrologically, the search of the Arian is for a separate identity, and, like the Sun it exalts, Aries is the most fiery of all the signs. The personal qualities of the Arian are boundless energy and pioneering exuberance, though they can be impatient and self-centered, concentrating on future success and ignoring their pasts, and doing battle with anyone who stands in their way. William Shatner, Warren Beatty, Joan Crawford, Anita Bryant, Marlon Brando, Howard Cosell, Jayne Mansfield, Hugh Hefner, David Letterman, and Robert Downey, Jr., were all born under the sign of the Ram.²

The alchemists also associated the Fire sign of Sagittarius with the incendiary fires of Calcination, and the Egyptians considered it a sign of war. However, the quest of the misunderstood Sagittarian is only for wisdom. The Sagittarian is expansive, playful, brutally honest, with a fiery imagination that

is often full of sexual images, but if they can control their imaginations, their outspokenness makes them excellent teachers and preachers, as well as a type of leader that never backs down. Famous people born under the sign of Sagittarius include William F. Buckley, Jr., Abbie Hoffman, Betty Grable, Mariel Hemingway, Jimi Hendrix, Kirk Douglas, Teri Garr, David Carradine, Woody Allen, Jane Fonda, and Bette Midler.

Calcination is only the first step in the process of personal transformation, but it is the crucial break with the world necessary to begin the Work. We will continue our trek toward the perfected Stone in the following chapter, where the ashes resulting from the Calcination of our ego and conscious thoughts are dissolved in the powerful waters of the id and the subconscious mind.

1 From Dr. Ralph Metzner, *Opening to Inner Light: The Transformation of Human Nature and Consciousness* (Los Angeles: Jeremy Tarcher Inc., 1986).

2 Character profiles in this section are taken from two excellent books dealing with the astrological archetypes: Kathleen Burt, *Archetypes of the Zodiac*, and Ariel Guttman and Kenneth Johnson, *Mythic Astrology: Archetypal Powers in the Horoscope*. Both books were published by Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1996.



Chapter 12

DISSOLUTION: LEARNING TO LET GO

Two Fish Swim in Our Sea

Hidden in the dark recesses of the scorched matter and ashes that remain after Calcination is a weak essence, the tiny spark of the true Self. It is with that tiny essence that the alchemist plans to work, but in order to completely free this spark of light from its prison in matter, there must be a further breakdown of the material. That is accomplished through Dissolution, the addition of water or solvent to the calcined powder, which represents the remains of the personality. To the astonishment of the ancient experimenters, solid powder disappeared into a solvent as if it had been returned to its original, undifferentiated state, and they saw this process as a return to the womb for rebirth.

The goal of Dissolution is to immerse and dissolve the ego in the murky water of the unconscious, which the alchemists referred to in their code phrase “the water which does not wet the hands.” They also called it the Alkahest (the universal solvent) or the Elixir, which literally means “from the ashes.” The idea is to clean up the murky depths within, so that we can work with only the two great fish that remain when all else is dead and gone. These two fish, Soul and Spirit, are shown in alchemical drawings swimming in opposite directions in the sea of the unconscious, pulling against each other as Spirit longs to return to its home in the sky, and Soul hugs the bottom, having fallen in love with the delights of matter. The ultimate goal is to pluck these two fish from the unconscious and bring them to the surface together as one, and the cluttered world of the personal ego is the first to be sacrificed in order to do this.

For someone with a well-developed ego, Dissolution can be a frightening experience. The purpose is to reveal what we try most to conceal: our souls. To expose the soul requires letting go of control, breaking habits, allowing

feelings to flow, and not hiding from emotions. Those buried emotions include our deepest pains and our greatest fears, and that powerful combination can produce some frightful monsters. Yet all the monsters confronted during Dissolution are illusions, products of our own mental landscape. Nevertheless, the ego feels that unless it keeps strict control, all the monsters it hid away so carefully will suddenly break loose and overwhelm it.

On the other hand, someone with a less developed ego might find the experience of Dissolution blissful, which can be even more dangerous. The alchemists saw this type of experience as primordial incest, in which a person desires to be absorbed by the Great Mother. Those experiencing such regressive self-dissolution run the gamut from saints to drug addicts; it happens whenever someone lets themselves surrender totally into the pleroma of the unconscious. This is never union with the divine, although it may appear so, for the subconscious powers represent only half the alchemical equation.

The whole point of alchemy is to achieve spiritual perfection without losing sight of the world. The idea is to bring hidden truths to fruition, to incarnate them in physical reality. Thus the ideal Dissolution is achieved when the operation is performed only on the tyrant king, the old ruling principle of ego. The king must be humbled by a direct confrontation with the primal energies of the unconscious and acknowledge their power. One of the most noticeable effects of Dissolution in a person is the withdrawal of the ego's projections. When we look around the world and see things that anger or revolt us, it is because that same quality lives unconsciously within us. It is a reflection of a part of ourselves that we have not yet acknowledged or taken responsibility for. We expend tremendous psychic energy projecting these qualities into the external world and keeping ourselves from facing the truth about them.



The king suffers through Dissolution in the waters of his own unconscious. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfort 1617)

My Dissolution: Exposing Secret Faults

The operations of Dissolution and Calcination sometimes go hand-in-hand and occur simultaneously. That such opposing elements of Water and Fire should work together is actually a major theme in alchemy. Both are operations of cleansing and purification, and we must undergo baptisms of both Water and Fire before we can be born into spirit. During the height of my Calcination experience described in the previous chapter, I started having

a recurring nightmare. At the time, I was extremely busy editing five different newsstand publications, as well as working with the media and research organizations on various projects. Although I was not aware of it I was ignoring something within me that was desperate for attention.

The dream always opened with me walking as fast as I can from the subway to my Park Avenue office in Manhattan. Though I am anxious to get to work, I notice a commotion in the yard in front of a small brick church and I stop to see what is going on. There are hundreds of people listening to a half-dozen speakers standing on soap boxes and debating which religion is best. Among them, and totally ignored by the crowd, is a small boy also standing on a soapbox, but he is telling everyone to go home, that they do not belong there. He keeps screaming: "Don't listen to them! They are not even of *our* religion." Though I have no idea what religion he is talking about, I admire the lad, who has the courage to speak out even when no one is listening.

Once at the office, I spend the day trying to fend off new projects, but like a fool, I keep accepting them. Even on the way home, someone catches me in the elevator and talks me into teaching fire-men how to put out fires. Then, in the street, I am nearly run down by a hook-and-ladder fire engine. "Where," I ask myself, "is the fire?" When I finally make it home, I am exhausted, but I also have an important project there. I have this small thing in the cupboard that I am trying to save. Originally, it belonged to my parents who kept it alive and well, but now that I have it, it is dying.

I open the cupboard and take out a small cardboard cutout of me. I have enclosed it in clear plastic and put in some honey to keep it nourished. Suddenly, I realize to my horror that I have taped the edges of the plastic all the way around. The cardboard figure is not getting any air! I have had it sealed like this for some time, because the tape has yellowed and it is difficult to remove. Once I get it all off, I carefully peel back the plastic from the cutout, which is limp and disintegrating. The cardboard man is faded white and very dead-looking, and I frantically try to bring him back to life. I move him around a little; he starts to breathe. Then his eyes open halfway, and he just stares at me plaintively. The little man is very weak because the honey has crystallized, and he is all dried out inside. I rush to revive him. The cardboard is frayed and decayed around the edges, so I decide to trim it off. I am trimming the fragile figure with scissors that are too large and am in such

a hurry that I cut off some of his tiny fingers. Next I slice through one of his arms, and it falls into my lap. I realize I am cutting too fast but I cannot stop. Finally, I sever his head. In my haste to save him, I have destroyed this helpless little man.

After the dream, I would wake up in a state of fear and confusion, as if I had really decapitated someone I cared about. With only minor variations, the nightmare kept coming back every few months, and each time I awoke, I was just as upset. Sometimes I was in such a state that tears welled up in my eyes and I could not go back to sleep. On three separate occasions, while I was on the road in different cities, I had the dream and awoke in the middle of the night in my motel room. The first time, I felt compelled to read a Gideon Bible that was lying open on the nightstand. The next time, I saw a folded wad of pages containing the same passage in the holy book. The third time, I took the Bible from a drawer and opened it at random to a food-stained page. All three times, the same page was open before me. It was page 616, the concluding lines to Psalm 19, which I later learned was considered the Alchemical Psalm. The passage was about keeping all seven characteristics of the laws of God for which He had sent a “tabernacle for the sun.” “More are they desired than gold,” I read of these unspoken laws, “yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the Great Transgression.”

What were the secret faults of my soul and presumptuous sins of my ego? Had I committed the Great Transgression and given up the magic I once saw in the world? I was not conscious of these sins in me, but I knew that this psalm was somehow pointing its finger at me and describing the eerie process I was going through at the time. Through these unexplainable synchronicities, I realized that I had brought something back from my nightmares that had its own separate existence. I was not an especially religious person at the time, and it is hard to explain the sense of dread I felt when I realized that something so irrational was happening to me. The worst part was being caught up in a process I knew nothing about. A persistent Dissolution was taking place inside me without my being able to control it or even describe it, and it continued until I left New York. Gradually, in the parched landscape of

Nevada, I began to infuse my soul with the fresh air of spirit and finally succeeded in bringing the little man inside me back to life, and I vowed to someday transform that flimsy cardboard figure into a solid presence that no one, including myself, could deny.

Working with Water

Psychiatrists Herbert Silberer and Carl Jung were the first to notice the striking similarities between the processes depicted in the drawings of medieval alchemists and the dream imagery reported by people in psychological therapy. Since then, those same alchemical images have been documented in witnesses to paranormal phenomena, as well as in persons undergoing a variety of mystical revelations that range from psychedelic visions to near-death experiences. Images of Dissolution include tears, acid, syrupy fluids, menstruation, dissection, breaking apart, washing, streams, floods, orgies, and intoxication. Alchemical engravings at this stage depict the king or queen sitting in a bath or drowning in a river, looking into a mirror, decaying or melting away, and being devoured or cut to pieces. There are also depictions of poisonous toads, fish, whales, and confrontations with stags hiding in forests or rabbits diving down holes, as well as basilisks (winged serpents) and horrifying monsters guarding secret treasures. Dissolution is sometimes exemplified by pictures of the Sun and Moon surrounded by total darkness with a white bird descending from the sky. The tarot image of Dissolution is the naked Queen, who represents lunar consciousness and the feminine soul of the alchemist. The common theme in all these images is the alchemical element of Water.

One modern example of how our mind works with images of Water is the dream of a middle-aged man who had to confront a life-threatening surgical procedure at the same time his marriage and career were falling apart. "World life is seen as in a great bowl," he described the opening of his dream. "Then there is a huge flood; something like a dam lets loose and everything is overwhelmed. It is a cataclysm, a catastrophe of huge proportions, and all is washed away in the rising waters. We flee before the deluge, and some of us

escape. Then it seems as if we are in a new era. This is world life seen inside a great sphere. There are many levels connected by stair-cases, ramps, etc., all around an open center. Apartments and living spaces are part of the outer wall. Before it was night, now it is day. In the middle, all is earth. It is a thick layer covering over the water.” ¹ This man’s dream carries with it all the power and promise of the element of Water to wash away existing mental structures and establish a new, more centered and balanced environment. It is an expression of the Great Flood, God’s cleansing deluge that wipes away all falsity.

Much of the apparatus used in alchemical operations with Water were invented by a Jewish alchemist who lived sometime before 100 B.C.E. Her name was Maria Prophetissa, and she was known for her ability to combine the practical with the mystical aspects of the Work. Zosimos, a highly respected Greek alchemist living in Egypt in the third century, credits all his alchemical knowledge to Maria. In his manuscripts, he portrayed alchemy as discipline guided by dreams and visions, and he taught that metals could be turned into gold in a process combining death and resurrection. In many ways, Maria Prophetissa is the female counterpart to Hermes, and according to legend, she was really Miriam the Prophetess, sister of Moses to whom Hermes gave the Emerald Tablet for safekeeping. Maria’s emphasis was always on the importance of the waters used in the Dissolution and Distillation phases of alchemy (see page 253). Her interpretation of the Emerald Tablet revolves entirely around Water: “The Water is an Angel and descends from the sky, and the earth accepts it on account of the earth’s moistness. The Water of the sky is held by the Water of the earth, and the Water of the earth acts as its servant. Its sand serves for the purpose of honoring it. Both the Waters are gathered together, and the Water holds the Water. The vital principle holds the vital principle, and the vital principle is whitened by the vital principle.”²

This universal merging of watery forces was described by Teresa of Avila, whose Dissolution we examined in chapter 5 (“Its Father Is the Sun”). “It is like rain falling from the heavens into a river or a spring,” she wrote in *The Interior Castle*. “There is nothing but water there and it is impossible to divide or separate the water belonging to the river from that which fell from the heavens. Or it is as if a tiny streamlet enters the sea, from which it will

find no way of separating itself. Or as if in a room there were two large windows through which light streamed in: it enters in different places but it all becomes one.”

Dissolving Meditations

Maria Prophetissa invented a method of Dissolution which became the standard process for washing the ashes of Calcination. Called the “Bain Marie,” it is basically a double-boiler in which the water in the bathing vessel is kept at a constant temperature by immersing it in a second container of water simmering over a gentle flame. Besides its practical application, the Bain Marie is also a useful meditative tool for handling the destroyed psychic remains resulting from Calcination. The Bain Marie Meditation exudes a maternal warmth, and the fire of consciousness is turned down considerably. The idea is to dissolve the burnt-out thoughts and leftover emotions dredged up during the previous blaze of introspection and treat them as a cohesive whole.

Here is how it works: Seated or lying down, calm yourself with several deep breaths, and then inhale very slowly. Imagine you are taking in the warm, dissolving waters of the Bain Marie. Hold the breath for a few seconds and let it “work” on those painful emotions or on any area in your mind or body where you feel tension or pain. Then exhale slowly and deeply—as deeply as you can—and imagine those hardened hurtful areas melting away. Repeat this circulation of dissolving “waters” as long as it takes until you feel genuine relief. Then relax and breathe normally. If you feel the troublesome areas returning, begin the Bain Marie again. Remarkable results can be obtained with this very basic exercise in just a few sessions.

The time required for this visualization to work depends on how deep and crystallized your psychic energy has become. What will it take to Dissolve you? Ask yourself how you have been hurt by unrequited love or another person’s wrath. Was someone mean to you or did someone abuse you? How did you react? Relive the experience, but this time *work* with it. Your wound is your gold, and in order to mine the precious metal within, you have to be

willing to relive your pain. That means not thinking about the individual incidents behind the emotions but rather trying to feel and work with only their pure energy, what Maria called their “vital principle.” If you can successfully dissolve the connections between the emotions and their source, the energy will be free to use elsewhere. It is the same alchemical principle as collecting hot mercury from the roasting cinnabar and putting it in a bottle for later use.

Another relevant alchemical meditation at this stage is the Cibation Meditation. It is based on a technique in alchemy called Cibation, which is the addition of water or other fluids to the dried-out matter at precisely the right moment to complete its Dissolution. Psychologically, this is a sensitizing process in which painful memories and hardened reactions are dredged up and felt again with the goal of refining the emotions tied to them. In this type of meditation, we turn our consciousness inward to examine the areas of our psyche that appear the driest and most crystallized. Then we “add” intensified emotions and feelings to reexperience them again with the objective of breaking them down. Usually it is at this point that we rediscover our pain and can release the energy of crystallization by liquefying it and making it flow again under our control. So, go back to your childhood and retrieve the most painful memory you can find. Reexperience the day a loved one died—a pet or friend or brother or mother—and cry until you can cry no more. You must make yourself cry for Dissolution to occur, so do not be afraid to feel the pain again. Medieval alchemists believed the salt in tears was the actual remnant of crystallized thoughts broken down by crying. This technique has proved successful over and over again in treating eating disorders, sex problems, drug abuse, depression, insomnia, out-of-control tempers, and many other complaints, and it is one of the simplest and fastest-working methods in all of psychology.

The Transforming Power of Illness

Another way the Water element can be experienced is through total resignation and repose. When it is under our deliberate control, this is the

“just being” aspect of Zen. It requires simply letting yourself live entirely in the moment, without judgment or comment of any kind, like a child. We become one with our environment and experience anything that happens slowly, with feeling. It may take a little practice because we have all spent most of our adult lives under the control of our compulsively thinking, endlessly scheming egos. When we finally succeed in living only in the here and now, without goals or consequences or fears, we suddenly experience a sense of tremendous freedom and refreshment. At that instant, we are able to directly experience the true alchemy of our being as we interact with the face-to-face reality of the eternal now. We actually experience the Water of the soul coursing through the body as innocent, unspoiled emotional energy. If we are lucky, and are far enough progressed in our personal alchemy to have exposed our hidden essence, we might discover the Fifth Element of our being, the Quintessence that lies waiting in each and every one of us.

Sometimes, however, we are not in control of the powers of Dissolution, and they are forced on us by sickness and disease. In times of extreme physical stress, the ego is simply knocked aside by the unconscious powers of the body struggling to recuperate, and we are forced to live in the present moment by the constant reminder of bodily pain and discomfort. Yet, as we saw in the case of Teresa of Avila, even devastating illnesses can be an opportunity to harness alchemical forces and open a channel to the Above. In some cases, an illness-initiated Dissolution can release pent-up emotional energies that actually effect a physical cure. Nonetheless, Dissolution by illness is usually interpreted as a negative experience because it takes us to the edge of life and unceremoniously tosses aside the security blanket of ego. Dissolution is the surrender and refashioning of one’s innermost substance, and that is true no matter on what level it occurs, even if we are talking about death, which is the final Dissolution. Even when facing death, living in the eternal moment points to a greater reality. This idea was expressed most admirably by Willis Harman, president of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, in a book written shortly before his death:

I wasn’t physically near death at the time, but I was in a profound depression. For the first time, I understood what people go through with psychological depression. This episode seemed to have to do with the deep realization—I felt it somewhere in the region of my stomach—that my life was approaching its end. Then, one morning, I walked up a hill to see the

sunrise and in one indescribable moment all the depression lifted. Life was joyous again. Something was now clear at a deep feeling level that had not been before: All the material aspects of life that I had learned to value, throughout my years, were clearly of no lasting value at all—for in a few instants they would be gone. But one thing is of true value—and only one. Alan Watts had called it “The Supreme Identity”—the identification with the Divine. With this realization my life’s journey seemed complete. If, ultimately, my deepest being partakes of the Divine, all the mundane trials and tribulations of my transitory, bodily self become mere blips in the experience of the Supreme Identity. What really matters is already perfect.³

The Dissolved Person

People who have not undergone Dissolution are judgmental, greedy, and excessive, and their relationships can only be described as selfish, but because of their ungrounded optimism, they tend to shine in social situations. In such persons, the process of Dissolution results in a withdrawal of psychological projections and judgments and a breakdown of other assumptions and habits. The person’s belief system is completely overhauled to accept a transpersonal view into his or her life. The result is a release of pent-up energy previously spent supporting the false personality and its self-centered view of the world.

The product of a successful Dissolution is a wonderfully flowing presence, free of inhibitions, prejudgments, and rigid mental structures. The person is no longer afraid to express that which is within. The purification on the level of ego and the deeper repressed level of the subconscious has allowed the forces of a greater presence within us to shine through the personality without being concealed or distorted by it. These are traits often associated with actresses like Shirley MacLaine, Mary Tyler Moore, and Sally Field.

The astrological cipher the alchemists used to signify the Dissolution process was the Water sign of Cancer, which the Egyptians called the Scarab. Just as the Scarab epitomized the soul being born into a higher reality, so

does Cancer signify the Cosmic Womb, and the search of the Cancerian is for the Mother Goddess. The moody, emotionally centered, complaining, and subjective Cancerian can also be extremely caring, patient, loyal, and family-oriented but demands sensitivity and security from those around him or her. Meryl Streep, Kris Kristofferson, Carly Simon, George Michael, Kathy Bates, Bill Cosby, Princess Diana, and Ingmar Bergman were all born under the sign of the Crab.

If performed correctly, the operations of Fire and Water (Calcination and Dissolution) have eliminated the dross of the matter at hand, whether it be chemical or psychological in nature, and revealed its most basic constituents or essences. It is the job of the next step in alchemy to filter and separate the material worthy of further attention in the Work.

[1](#) This dream is from one of Dr. Edward F. Edinger's patients and is presented in Edinger, *Anatomy of the Psyche: Alchemical Symbolism in Psychotherapy* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1985).

[2](#) From Jack Lindsay, *The Origins of Alchemy in Greco-Roman Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970). Few of Maria's original writings have survived, though she is officially credited with the discovery of the distillation of alcohol and the invention of many devices, including the "tribikos," a three-funneled alembic which made possible higher temperature distillations. Zosimus of Panopolis (300 C.E.) wrote extensively about her contributions to alchemy. The story of Miriam the Prophetess is related in the Bible (Exodus 15:12 and 15:20).

[3](#) From Willis Harman's introduction to Willis Harman and Elisabet Sahtouris, *Biology Revisioned* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1998).

Chapter 13



SEPARATION: IDENTIFYING ESSENCES

The Black Crow Caws

While Dissolution is primarily a subjective experience, the next operation, Separation, takes a more objective approach. Chemically, it involves extraction of material from the alchemical solution through further heating, filtration, and sifting. Psychologically, it is the development of a self-deprecating attitude in the personality as we become aware of all the little tricks and illusions that have been fostered by ego, including the deeper fantasies and monsters engendered by the id, or unconscious mind. During this breaking down of the personality into its basic components, the alchemist becomes aware of the opposites within and separates them from their contamination with ego complexes and unwanted unconscious elements. Depth psychologists consider containing and uniting these mental opposites the basis for the creation of consciousness.

For the alchemists, the Black Crow was the perfect symbol for this consciousness-creating process. The bird's color stands for the beginning stages of alchemy—the dark phases of the death of the profane—yet as a bird, it is a messenger of spirit and hope. Crows are notorious scavengers, often collecting shiny trinkets, and in medieval times were thought to be attracted to gold. Their loud cawing has been described as a call to higher consciousness and was part of ancient divination rituals. For Native Americans, the crow is the creator of the visible world, the great civilizing force of the universe. The crow was also the primary emblem of the first Chinese emperors, who saw it as a symbol of yang, or masculine energy. They depicted it as a three-legged black bird standing in the center of the solar disk. The three legs of the bird represented the three manifestations of the sun (dawn, midday, dusk) that in alchemy correspond to the three heavenly elements (Sulfur, Mercury, Salt). These were the elements that

made Hermes thrice greatest and that Balinas tried to refine during his daily meditation sessions at dawn, midday, and dusk.

The Black Crow is present in all three of the first stages of alchemy, observing the processes of Calcination and Dissolution closely, but its real work does not begin until the operation of Separation. The purpose of Separation is the classification and analysis of previously hidden material by the rational mind to extract a person's essence. In human terms, that recovered "material" consists of the charred remains of ego from Calcination and the repressed memories and emotions released during Dissolution. Somewhere in that mass of confusion lies the spark of the true Self. Dissecting and discarding what is no longer relevant or useful is the important goal of the Separation process. It requires a sharp and decisive will, since many of the suspended elements have a sticky residue of ego or emotion tied to them. On the personal level, we all know how difficult it can be to let go of destructive habits and behavior patterns. The message here is that only by living on the razor's edge can we get beyond the viewpoint of ego and perceive both sides of reality. By consciously confronting previously unconscious elements, we create new consciousness and gain perspective on the ways in which people project their viewpoints and feelings into the world to create the illusion of personal security.

My Separation: Mining Gold

In the midst of my ego-shattering Calcination in the publishing world and my concurrent Dissolution, in which subconscious forces began to express themselves in dreams and disturbing coincidences, it really seemed as if I would never be able to pull my life back together. Not only had I lost my career, but I had lost the solid rationality upon which I had based my approach to life. Instead of moving forward, it appeared that I was on a downward spiral, from a self-assured mathematician to a never-sure paranormal researcher, and then from a cocksure New York editor to a totally confused laborer in a Nevada gold mine.

My Separation from all this hopeless floundering began the day the cable

broke and sent the unmanned, one-ton cage plummeting 1,800 feet to the bottom of the gold mine. Fortunately, no one was injured, but the accident severely damaged the shaft and the ill-fated Gooseberry Mine was forced to close down. Living in a tiny trailer in the middle of the Nevada desert, I had no job prospects and lived off unemployment compensation and my meager savings for nearly a year. Yet my confinement in the arid retreat proved one of the most fruitful periods in my life. I began looking back over my life and owning up to the mistakes I had made, and I soon discovered they were all errors of judgment. I had made assumptions about the world and based my goals only on the viewpoints of my own ego and the superego of society. I had spent my time striving after preset goals instead of really examining the paths to truth open to me. When I took the time to reflect on these things, a whole new world opened, and I saw where the work in my life really needed to take place. Strange images from alchemy books I had studied in Vienna and Prague a decade earlier flooded my mind. The spiritual nature of the work of the alchemists became absolutely clear to me, and I began applying their methods of transforming lead into gold to myself. The gold I ended up mining was not from a hole in the ground but from the deepest part of my own being.

Sifting through the remains of my life, I discovered what was of value and what was not. I spent my limited funds on alchemy books and devoted most of my time to applying the principles I was learning. Finally, I was ready to leave the desert. I moved to California, got a well-paying job as an industrial automation programmer, and became a practicing alchemist. I built an isolation tank that ended up weighing more than the fateful cage that plummeted to the bottom of the gold mine—and appropriately too, for I was plumbing deeper than any earthly mine could reach. I also designed a variety of electronic equipment to explore altered states of consciousness and deepen my meditative abilities. My library of alchemy books grew to over two thousand volumes dating as far back as the 1600s, and I spent a lot of time translating the obscure tomes into English. I even set up a small lab in which I duplicated some of the experiments the books described. Finally, I was working again. However, it was not on anything that I was expected to do as part of my job or part of what anyone else thought I should be doing. I was working feverishly in a debunked, defunct discipline that had reached its glory four hundred years before I was born. I could not have been happier.

Working with Air

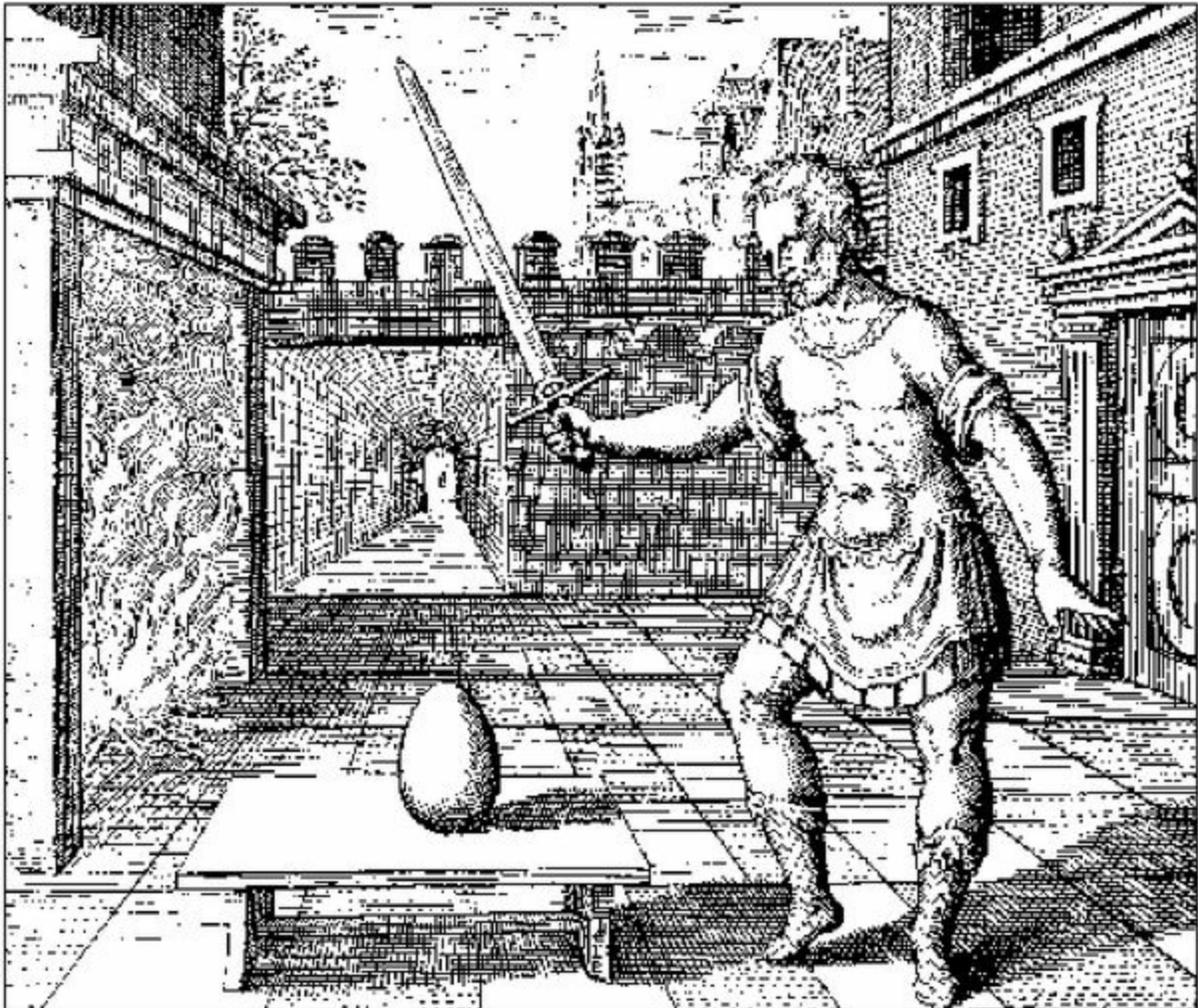
While I did not realize it at the time, what I was really doing during this period was working with the Air element to spiritize my life. When I acknowledged its fundamental presence in the world, alchemical Air lifted me from the quagmire of my life and showed me the view from on high. Indeed, spirit does come with the Wind—concealed in its belly, according to the Emerald Tablet—and it arrives unexpectedly, out of nowhere. The most encompassing esoteric definition of the Wind is simply that it is an expression of divine will. It fills the world between heaven and earth and interacts with us as a heaven-sent influx of energy with its own unfathomable agenda. In the subtle world, the Wind is the manifestation of spirit, and ultimately, the thoughts of the One Mind.

Working with the Air element can bring a profoundly invigorating “breath of fresh air” to the battered personality. Often such experiences give people new insight into the meaning of life and provide an objective reference point for the reality of the psyche. The element of Air is higher spiritual insight, and, according to most cosmogenic myths, carries the Word of God which initiates the primordial Separation of the universe into the Above and the Below. The ethereal presence of the Air Element is accessed by deemphasizing material reality and embracing the reality of spirit. That can be accomplished through a variety of means that include meditation, fervent prayer, breathing exercises, ritual initiations, hypnagogic states, and near-death experiences. Even psychedelic episodes can produce positive Separation, as shown by one recent case in which a professional woman and mother of three children had an out-of-body experience after experimenting with LSD:

I knew I was on my way when a releasing and delicious sense of floating in the atmosphere took over and engulfed my entire being. My sense of being contained in my body dissolved. I laughed with delight and said out loud, “Now I remember what it’s like to be without a body.” I was in contact with some level of being, fully conscious but without embodiment. An awareness

took form in my mind that I had resisted being born into the world in my present incarnation. I understood why. Air is my true element, the matrix of my being. The ecstasy of being free of my body—the aging process, backaches, headaches, creaky joints—lasted an eternity. I was no longer confined by the space-time dimensions of earth. How amazing to be “me,” fully aware and conscious, and yet without any physical vehicle.”¹

Out-of-body experiences are the ultimate Separation of our essence from physicality. Most of the time our psyche is not prepared for such a profound Separation and it reacts in panic or fear, which pulls us back into the body. The soul cannot leave the body voluntarily without being fused with spirit, whose natural home is outside the body. This final and lasting fusion between soul and spirit and the universe does not take place until the final stage of alchemy, Coagulation.



During Separation, the alchemist must split apart and expose the hermetically sealed Egg of Self. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfurt 1617)

The images of Separation are tools like knives, scissors, hatchets, and swords. In fact, during the Middle Ages, swordsmanship was considered a Hermetic discipline, in which the initiate tried to apply the laws of geometric proportions to slicing through space. Other alchemical images include dismemberment, mutilation, surgery, decapitation, divorce, splitting of the Red Sea, the release of steam, breaking apart of heaven and earth, a lone feather, the formation of eggs and embryos, scenes from the Apocalypse as well as Genesis, and complicated geometric diagrams such as the alchemical Squaring of the Circle. Tarot symbols of Separation are the king, which stands for masculine consciousness and insight, and Justice, symbol of disposition and balance, which are the desired attributes of the King. Alchemical engravings of this process show a black bird standing watch over the previous processes of Calcination and Dissolution, a white bird taking flight with fire and a blackened earth below, or two birds picking apart the remains of a dead bird.

The goal of Separation is to find the elements of the unborn Self. At this stage the aspiring alchemist must isolate the essences within and save only those that are worthy of redemption—even if he may break in so doing. Through the process of Separation, the alchemist confronts his true Self and realizes that he is made up of two basic components: an indestructible soul or essence and a higher spiritual component. For the first time, the primitive ego understands there is truly something bigger. A person's soul is revealed, his spirit is released, and the energy freed from the breakdown of psychic structures is used to rebuild the personality and establish new attitudes.

Sifting Techniques

Separation breaks through the illusory cosmic play that Hindu philosophers referred to as “maya,” a concept that dominates much of Indian

thought. In the shamanic tradition, cutting through worldly illusion is referred to as the ability to “see,” while the process of trying to catch the ego in its habits and manipulations is part of “stalking.” From these and other traditions, a variety of “sifting techniques” are available for the modern alchemist to achieve Separation. For example, one psychological method is simply to relax and concentrate on the breath, while periodically asking oneself the question “Who is aware?” In the silence of the response, we can feel our own consciousness at the ground of our being. Alternatively, we can sit in a silent, dark room and repeat our name over and over, trying to determine what it really means. By observing ourselves observing ourselves, we enter an infinite progression or mental loop—until finally there is no difference between the observer and the observed, between us and our consciousness. That primal awareness is a big part of our true Self. This state of separated identity is what Alfred Lord Tennyson experienced many times during his life. “A kind of trance I have frequently had, quite up from my boyhood, when I have been all alone,” he admitted in his memoirs. “This has generally come upon me through repeating my own name to myself silently, until all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being; and this is not a confused state but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality seeming no extinction, but the only true life.”²

Another sifting technique is called using our “Second Attention.” The way in which we pay attention to the world in everyday life is the First Attention, and most people only know this single way of ordering the world. Yet it is possible to open the doors to another reality, parallel and separate from normal reality. If we look at a person with our First Attention, we see their body and their physical attributes and usually make some kind of snap judgment based on that information. However, if we defer judgment and use the Second Attention, we can sense things about their character or even state of health. Sometimes, we can even see into the “luminous egg of being” which precedes and engulfs a person’s physical presence, such as we saw form in the invocation of Hermes in the third chapter. Shamans spend many years developing the Second Attention, though they usually begin by simply

focusing on things that normally go unnoticed. Concentrating on shadows instead of objects, focusing on a person's body movements rather than what he or she says, or simply doing something routine in a different way (like walking backwards) are all first steps in this process. By entering a state of "not doing" or not participating in the world and halting the internal dialogue that supports the First Attention, the shaman heightens his intuitive awareness and eventually develops Second Attention.

Alchemistic Aeration

Aside from such psychological methods of Separation, there are a number of physical methods available. Akhenaten allegedly developed some of these methods at a school he founded in the city of Akhetaton that was devoted to the teaching of spiritual breathing techniques. These centered around working with the subtle life force that Hermes said "the Wind carries in its belly." Known in Indian alchemy as *prana* and in Taoist alchemy as *chi*, this vital breath is responsible for a person's state of health and can also be harnessed for his or her spiritual transformation. This life force was denoted in ancient Egypt by the Ankh, which Thoth is often depicted holding (see chapter 2, page 23). "For the motion of the chariot, which is the physical body," wrote the Hindu sage Vasishtha in his *Yoga Vasishtha*, "the God created the mind and *prana*, without which the body cannot function. When the *prana* departs, the mechanism of the body ceases, but when the mind works *prana* moves. The relation between the mind and *prana* is like that between a driver and his chariot. Both exert motion one upon the other. Therefore, the wise should study the regulation of *prana* if they desire to suspend the restless activity of mind and concentrate. The regulation of breath brings all happiness, material and spiritual."

That breath could be so intimately connected with the mind sounds ridiculous to most Westerners, though most of us would admit, on examining our breathing rhythms, that they are related to mental states. Emotions of fear, love, and embarrassment all cause changes in our breathing, as do boredom, inspiration, calmness, and other intellectual qualities, and many

actors have learned how to turn emotions on and off by eliciting the appropriate breathing pattern. Whether they are aware of it or not, public speakers, hypnotists, psychics, and healers exercise some control over pranic forces. Alchemists try to control *prana* to awaken dormant spiritual forces within them and achieve perfection.

Alchemistic Aeration directs and stores the vital breath within the body so it can be used by the spiritual alchemist. The goal is to become thrice greatest at breathing and to manifest *prana* when inhaling on all three levels of the lungs. Most people have fallen into the habit of breathing on only one level, thus depriving themselves of vital energy. The stomach breather fills the lower part of the lungs; the rib breather, who uses only the intercostal muscles of the ribs, fills the pulmonary midsection with air; the top breather, who raises the shoulders and collarbones when taking in air, fills only the upper portion of the lungs. When exhaling, most people squeeze out only the top of the lungs, causing stagnation of the tiny air sacs in the lungs and limiting the amount of fresh air that can be taken in. The ideal breather aerates the entire lung cavity on every breath and empties it completely during exhalation.

To try this yourself, sit upright in a chair and relax. Using the diaphragm, take a deep breath while expanding the stomach, followed by a slow expansion of the rib cavity, and culminating in upper lung breathing that can be felt all the way into the throat. Then exhale completely, starting at the base of the lungs and climaxing at the top. Exhalation should take twice as long as inhalation. Practice inhaling for a count of eight and exhaling for a count of sixteen, while concentrating on filling and emptying all three levels of the lungs. To begin Alchemistic Aeration, follow the above breathing pattern but pause for a count of twenty-four after inhaling. At first it may not be easy to break years of improper breathing habits, but keep practicing until you are able to achieve these minimum periods of inhalation, retention, and exhalation. They can be expanded in the proportion of three counts while holding the breath and two counts of exhalation for every one count of inhalation. The purpose of this concentrated breathing exercise is to allow the breath to follow mind and establish a conscious connection between the two.

It is in the pause between breaths that many people experience something more profound than just physiological breathing. While holding the breath, some practitioners feel an involuntary rhythm rise in their bodies that brings a

fluid energy to the core of their being, and they feel as if they can go on holding their breath forever. This experience is known as embryonic breathing or the Primordial Breath—a sensation of breathing without breathing that puts one in direct contact with the pranic forces. It was these forces that the Oriental alchemists sought to harness for self-transformation within the same seven-stepped framework of Western alchemy. “In transporting the breath,” says a 2,500-year-old inscription from the Chou dynasty, “the inhalation must be full and the breath should be held and gathered. If it is gathered, it becomes magic. If it becomes magic, it descends and quiets down. If it quiets down, it solidifies. If it is solidified, then it germinates. If it germinates, it grows. If it grows, it retreats upward. If it retreats upward, it reaches the top of the head. If it reaches the top of the head, it still presses up, for the secret power of Heaven moves Above, and the secret power of Earth moves Below. He who follows this will live; he who acts contrary to this will die.”

The Separated Person

People who have not yet begun the process of Separation are tied to the earthly plane. They can be overly assertive and controlling, refusing to compromise in even the most mundane matters. At their worst, they are driven by frustration and anger and can become cruel or violent to others. On the other hand, people undergoing Separation tend to be courageous and daring, often initiating major changes in the world and the lives of the people around them, as did Alexander the Great. Successful Separation is the quality many people admire in actors like John Wayne, Katharine Hepburn, and Jodie Foster. If their unyielding willpower can be harnessed, such people can progress rapidly through alchemical transformation and work miracles never before seen in the world.

The astrological cipher for the Water sign of Scorpio is how the alchemists designated the Separation stage. The Egyptians related Scorpio to the descent into the underworld to bring back knowledge, and their Scorpio goddess was Selkhet, who led the deceased to the Other Side. The lifelong

search of Scorpions is for spiritual transformation, and their qualities are intense introspection and self-control. But Scorpions are bold and can be persistent and opinionated to a fault, often trampling the feelings of others in pursuing their goals. Theodore Roosevelt, George Patton, Senator Joseph McCarthy, Charles Manson, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Dylan Thomas, Richard Burton, Ed Asner, and Roseanne were all born under the sign of the Scorpion.

Just as societies and cultures can emphasize different aspects of soul or spirit, we all know people who seem to have more spirit than soul, or vice versa. But it is a rare person indeed who has succeeded in uniting both soul and spirit in one holistic approach to life. That harmonious marriage of soul and spirit takes place during an alchemical operation known as “Conjunction,” which we will attempt to experience in the next chapter.

1 The woman’s Separation experience is described in more detail in Edward F. Edinger, *Anatomy of the Psyche: Alchemical Symbolism in Psychotherapy* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishers, 1985).

2 From Alfred Tennyson, *Lord Alfred Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son*, volume 1 (London, England: Macmillan & Co., 1897).



Chapter 14 CONJUNCTION: CREATING THE OVERSELF

The Dance of the Cockerel

The new perspectives and energy released from the breakdown and reclassification of psychic structures during Separation gives the alchemist the strength to divorce himself from sterile “mental marriages”—stubborn beliefs and attitudes involving the ego’s striving to build fame, fortune, and family. The alchemists called these goal-oriented constellations of mental energy “Conjunctions,” and the multifarious unions of spirit with ego were known as “Terrestrial Conjunctions.” Breaking up these spiritually unproductive earthly marriages was the job of the first three steps on the ladder of alchemy (Calcination, Dissolution, and Separation). If those operations were successful, only the most genuine and essential parts of the matter at hand were left in the vessel of transformation. In spiritual terms, these essences are the very soul and spirit of the alchemist, and it is now time for these two most basic components to reunite in a new Conjunction. The alchemists saw this process as one of passionate lovemaking driven by the desires of archetypal masculine and feminine forces. Not surprisingly, the bird of Conjunction is the Cockerel, the young and virile rooster. As the symbol of male spirit, it is his job to seek out and seduce the female soul.

Ancient philosophers saw the human body not as a physiological machine but as a vessel for soul and spirit. Though many people today confuse these two for one another, spirit and soul are really two separate and unique entities. Spirit, our inner king, is constantly striving for the higher realms, constantly seeking something better; but soul, our inner queen, is not totally committed to perfection for its own sake. Instead, the soul feeds on the fire of existence with all its foibles and catastrophes. As the expression of the One Thing in man, soul is closely connected to matter and the body. She is not interested in explanations or one theory that accounts for everything. She

longs for storytelling and imagery. Food for the soul comes from everyday living, and she feels burdened by spiritual or mental disciplines. The lunar soul of the queen feels comfortable in depression and thrives on earthly things like money, home, and family. And it is not just the golden, precious moments that feed the soul, but the leaden, down and dirty, dismal ones too. The soul craves memories and reflection and seeks expression in art and music. The soul transcends rational descriptions and defies order, and her language is images and feelings.

The spirit of the king, on the other hand, is concerned with more heavenly pursuits like truth and beauty. He likes to engage in energetic expansion and is responsible for business, science, technology, and the patriarchal world in which we live. The solar spirit is the expression of the One Mind in man and feeds on abstract concepts, searching for unifying principles which he can apply to his existence. Spirit is after ultimates but requires the passion of the soul to succeed, and for that reason, spirit must always seek out soul and court her. However, like a third lover, the ego stands between soul and spirit, and until the alchemist is able to let go of his worldly arrangements with this interloper, he will not be able to unite soul and spirit and proceed further in the Work.

On the psychological level, Conjunction is the constellation of a new belief system less tied to convention and more in line with higher truths. Conjunction is the commitment Akhenaten made to “living in truth” and what the Bible asks us to do too. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world,” reads Romans 12, “but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is.” During Conjunction, the major effort in one’s life is the creation of a unified self that is true to both inner essences and universal truths and can withstand the onslaughts of ignorance, insensitivity, and illusion one encounters in the world. Conjunction gives us the equanimity necessary to carry on with the higher operations of alchemy.

My Conjunction: Becoming One Person

In the 1980s, I returned to Europe several times, determined to discover earlier translations of the Emerald Tablet and possibly find some leads about what happened to it after the burning of the Alexandrian library. Though I was refused permission to examine important documents at the Vatican, I was able to trace the Emerald Tablet back to the Moslem occupation of southern Spain in the twelfth century. I also made some exciting new discoveries, including a chemical formula encrypted into the words of the tablet (see chapter 20, “The Chemistry of Miracles”) and direct evidence of its connection to the Grail legend (see chapter 23, “Alchemy of the Millennium”). However, during these trips, my exposure to the old manuscripts and drawings unsettled me for some reason, and the images started showing up in my dreams and nightmares. It seemed as if my interest in alchemy somehow caused alchemy to be interested in me. I spent hours just staring at medieval alchemical engravings as if I was absorbing some secret teaching, like Balinas at the foot of Hermes’ statue. Then one night everything seemed to come together in a single, bizarre dream that carried unexpected power.

In the dream, I was standing on the top of a pile of manure with my bare feet sinking into warm compost, which was full of tiny worms. To my right I saw a small child drowning in a mound of seeds or wet grain. I could not tell if it was a boy or girl, but I heard the child choking and couldn’t let it die. I lunged to my right to try to break free, but I was so stuck in my own pile of manure that I could hardly move. Finally, after much strenuous effort, I was able to crawl free of the sticky, foul stuff. As I moved toward the child, I was nearly overcome by a stifling humidity that made it very hard to breathe. With much difficulty, I waded through the slimy but sweet-smelling grain and grabbed the child just as it was about to go under for a third time.

Immediately, we started ascending together, the faceless child clutching my chest. Defying gravity, we rose high above the ground, and I could see thousands of different piles below me with people trapped in them just like I was, and next to each one of them a small child was trapped too. Engrossed in trying to figure out what was going on, I did not notice that we were heading for a mountain, and suddenly, the jagged mountaintop emerged from the clouds. At that moment, the mysterious child vanished from my arms. I was on top of the mountain, on a small plateau covered with thick green moss. In front of me stood a waist-high boulder upon which lay three palm-

sized crystals. I picked up one of the crystals and examined it. The translucent crystal was velvety smooth and felt as if it was very old and had been handled a lot. I picked up the other two, and as soon as all three were together in my hand, they came alive, glowing with a faint green hue and pulsating with energy. This startled me, and I carefully lay the crystals back on the boulder, where they returned to their inert state.

Pausing to look around, I noticed that the entire plateau was tilted toward the opening of a cave in the side of the mountain. I walked toward the cave, and the closer I got the more I realized it was man-made, probably a mine of some type. I hesitated at the entrance because it was pitch-black inside, but the floor was flat and even, so I proceeded. I kept walking blindly, until I spotted a dim light ahead. I walked faster toward it, but when I reached it, I couldn't believe my eyes. The source of the light was two glowing *buttocks* embedded in the wall like some fleshy, golden ore. What was even more amazing was the way I responded to this disconcerting sight. I stood before it transfixed and humbled, as if I were standing before the throne of God. Inexplicably, I was overwhelmed by a feeling of being home, of being where I belonged. This big, androgynous butt was somehow the end of my journey!

I woke with a thump, as if I had been dropped back into my bed, and then sat up shaking my head in astonishment. I could not help but laugh out loud. I mean, what was I supposed to do, kiss the ass of God? Yet from this bizarre dream, I came away with a powerful gut feeling of wholeness and renewed confidence. No dream I had ever had affected me quite so deeply. But what did it mean? Looking back over the fateful dream, I now understand that it was full of alchemical symbols that reflected hidden processes taking place within me.

The child stuck in the pile of seeds and languishing in the humidity of the libido was my own soul. My spirit was stuck in the trappings of ego, full of energetic little worms leading an independent though pointless existence in a pile of manure that grows deeper the longer we live. My lunge to save the child was the beginning of my alchemy, and our rise together was our progress in the Work, as we transcended the elements of the Below and became one together in Conjunction. The waiting elements of the Above were represented by the three crystals lying on top of the Stone, and by bringing these three higher forces in me together, I was able to enter the Cave of the Ancients. There, unexpectedly, I found the tail of my own being,

waiting to be embraced like the neverending Ouroboros that is the result and revelation of the Great Work.

For me, the dream provided a truthful overview of all the levels of my life and caused me to totally revamp my assumptions about what was possible in my life. Combining the forces of soul and spirit within me provided an infusion of energy that gave me new confidence in my thoughts and feelings. Finally, I was one person, and my soul and spirit flowed into one another as partners. The war inside me had ended, and the resources I was wasting in the fruitless battle were now available for better uses. I saw what my life needed, though not from a social or self-centered viewpoint; instead, I saw what needed to be changed at the core of my being to bring my life in line with universal principles, so I too could finally “live in truth.” This reformulation of my beliefs and new energy led to behavior and experiences that I would not have previously thought possible, and my new perspective showed me what lay ahead. Much to the surprise of my friends and family, I suddenly quit my \$60,000-a-year job as an automation engineer to become a freelance author specializing in esoteric subjects. The higher stages of my alchemy were about to begin.

Marriage of the Sun and Moon

So fundamental are the forces of Conjunction that the alchemists usually portrayed it in overtly sexual terms and showed the king and queen (or Sol and Luna) mating passionately in a variety of positions and locations. Other images of Conjunction include the flaming heart, the fruitful earth, weddings, hermaphrodites, roosters with chickens, rams and satyrs, and glue or chains. Alchemical engravings show wizards dressed in half-white, half-black robes, two white birds raising a crown into heaven, or angels coming down from heaven. A Red Lion partly disappearing into a sphere or a white bird descending into flames with water and earth below also depict the Conjunction. Not surprisingly, the primary tarot card dealing with this stage is the Lovers, which represents the union of the king and queen. The Moon card is a symbol of their hermaphroditic offspring, the Lesser Stone, and the

Strength card represents the psychological result of Conjunction, which is the renewed will and energy to carry on in the Work and face the coming challenges.

Though they often depicted Conjunction as outright sexual intercourse, the alchemists were trying to describe inner experiences. They realized that no matter how fervently one desires the qualities of soul and spirit manifested in another person, intimate human re-lationships often spoil the golden treasure one expects to find. There is hope, however, if we can bring together the idealized essences of soul and spirit that we fall in love with in other people together within ourselves. “That which failed to become two in one flesh will succeed in becoming two in one spirit,” noted one Renaissance alchemist. “Earthly lovers, however greatly they may love,” wrote another, “must needs bear to be distinct and separate from one another; but You, O unfathomable fullness of all love, in virtue of Your being absolutely all in all, pour Yourself so utterly into the soul’s essence that no part of You remains outside.”¹



The Sun and Moon consummate their marriage in the humidity of the libido. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfurt 1617)

In Tantra, the oldest spiritual tradition in India, it was believed that the essences of soul and spirit could be exchanged both spiritually and physically. One example of a Tantric Conjunction ritual that attempts to harness spiritual forces is the “Fertilization of the Shiva Lingam.” The supplicant prepares an altar consisting of a small vessel filled with water suspended over a phallic-shaped rock known as a *lingam*. The sacred rock represents Lord Shiva, the archetypal source of male energy. It sits upright on an egg-holder or dish called the “*yonis*,” which represents archetypal feminine energy. The vessel has a small hole in the bottom and water drips out on the top of the *lingam*. The water inside the vessel symbolizes something personal

that we are willing to sacrifice, such as our current beliefs or emotional makeup. As the water drips down on the *lingam* and collects in the *yoni* dish, the masculine and feminine energies are balanced by our sacrifice. That selfless act causes the powerful energy of awakened consciousness, the Philosopher's Child, to become active in us.

On the physical level, the Tantric alchemists tried to accumulate the male and female essences during sexual intercourse. The concept is very similar to the practice of "Dual Cultivation" in Taoist alchemy. The goal of the sexual alchemist was to tap into the reservoir of soul energies in a woman without losing any of his own spiritual essence. That meant inventing a lot of odd methods and postures to ensure the man did not reach emission, while the woman enjoyed a prolonged orgasm. Surprisingly, the men thought they were getting the better end of the deal. They visualized female energy as a serpentine presence named *kundalini*, a kind of bodily One Thing which could be controlled by the male spirit and absorbed from the female during intercourse. In Western alchemy, this liquid fire was embodied in Vitriol and visualized as the two copulating serpents entwined around the magical wand of essences. It was thought that great power could be obtained by augmenting the supply of the female energy in the male, and Tantric alchemists were credited with amazing feats. It is even said that their urine and feces could change lead into gold, and Taoist alchemists allegedly used their sexual reserves to live hundreds of years.

Modern Tantric and Taoist practitioners recognize that intercourse is a two-way street, and women also share in the exchange of sexual polarities. In her doctoral thesis, San Francisco psychologist Dell Sokol documented the transcendent experiences of partners in sex and uncovered new confirmation of the power of sexual alchemy. One typical experience was that of a thirty-eight-year-old woman named Sara and her husband Robert. The couple meditated together twice daily and formed a metaphysical rapport between each other. Sara reported:

We began to make love, and somehow I felt this opening, simultaneously physically and spiritually, as he began to penetrate me. I felt it almost immediately. This is fairly typical of these occasions when we have a very transcendent experience. The experience of opening tends to be there right from the beginning. I think it has very much to do with my availability, my sensitivity. It is the spiritual preparation or disposition that matters and that

sensitivity or intuition [that] the greater reality is really, really there. That somehow gets wakened up as my body becomes awakened. On this particular occasion, that's what occurred, and this opening felt enormous. It wasn't even physical anymore. It felt like my pelvis literally became a funnel of energy, just widening and receiving this incredible force into it. All of a sudden the cork was taken off the energy in me, and it started flowing out of me into Robert. I think the only sense of form that was left came from the movement. It was just a sensation I was aware of, but what I felt myself to be was not that. I didn't feel myself to be the body. I felt myself to be radiance, tangible radiance and bliss. In that ecstasy the self was curiously diffused and not really distinct. All there was was energy that was somehow being generated between the two of us, but I no longer had any perception of the two of us. It was just what was happening and I was that.²

Other participants in the study reported similar experiences. One man in his midthirties said he felt completely possessed and taken over by spirit as he and his lover began relating in terms of bodies of light. Another man described it as a sense of blissful location that began in his head and extended into his whole body "so the whole body seems to be pervaded by, or lifted out of, its ordinary sense of self and suspended in pleasurable head-to-toe energy." What people are experiencing in such instances are the subtle manifestations of masculine and feminine energies that are part of any creative process. Now that we understand the Doctrine of Correspondences of the Emerald Tablet, it should not surprise us that such archetypal forces have corresponding physical expression in the human body. Those forces make up the life force itself, and for Egyptian alchemists especially, alchemy was about isolating this principle of life (see chapter 18, "The Alchemy of Health and Longevity").

Passion of the Androgyne

Among the most disturbing images of alchemical Conjunction are those that depict the union of soul with spirit as an act of incest or masturbation, and some medieval churchmen even accused alchemists of advocating lewd

and immoral behavior. However, such imagery is buried deep in the metaphysical roots of alchemy and symbolizes the ouroboric nature of the forces involved in transformation. According to the ancient Egyptian creation myth, the One Mind gives birth to himself from out of the chaos of the One Thing by masturbation. The metaphysical fire of his seed is consciousness, which becomes the tool of transformation for all sentient beings and the basis of alchemy.

Incest with a sister or mother is another way of expressing this primal act of creation. Sacred incest taking place in both the Below and the Above is described in the ancient, cabalistic *Zohar*: “When his mother is separated and conjoined with the king face to face in the excellence of the Sabbath, all things become one body. And then the Holy One sits on His throne, and all things are called the One Name. When the [greater] Mother is conjoined with the [greater] King, all the worlds receive blessing, and the universe is found to be in joy.”

Such acts of creation are viewed as incest only because they are internal to the individual, whether god or man, and the inner sex act takes place between the soul and spirit. However, as in many incestual pairings, the offspring tends to be deformed in some way, and consequently, the immediate chemical and psychological offspring of Conjunctions are shortlived. They are gross, though highly potential, meldings of opposites, which the alchemists considered grotesque hermaphrodites rather than viable children. They believed the phenomenon of the Stone at this stage was unpredictable and shortlived because the energy of spirit was still contaminated with traces of ego. Thus, the Stone immediately after Conjunction was pictured as a clump of lifeless earth referred to as the “Letharge,” and further operations were required to save it.

The rare, totally successful Conjunction produces not a hermaphrodite but a beautiful androgyne in whom the forces of soul and spirit are perfectly balanced and coagulated. Examples include Buddha, Apollonius of Tyana, and Jesus Christ. “When you make the two One,” Jesus said in the Gospel of Thomas, “and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the Above like the Below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, then you will enter the Kingdom of God.” In other words, we unite with our essences in a synergistic marriage of opposing psychic elements that takes us beyond just male or just female perspectives.

Working with Earth

For many people, the most powerful accumulation of female energy can be found in the planet itself. My friend Bernyce Barlow, an alternative healing therapist, has devoted her life to helping hundreds of abused youths balance their vengeful masculine energies by taking the kids on meditation safaris to sacred sites. This kind of Earth Alchemy—the recognition of the transformative feminine energy of the living planet—is spreading among researchers everywhere. That we must stop our patriarchal rape of the planet and learn to cultivate earth’s energies is the number one corollary of this new theory. Some scientists refer to it as the Gaia Principle, after the Greek goddess of the earth, but whatever it is called, it is about an opportunity to transform ourselves and the planet by communion with the forces of nature.

“Even though the types of frequencies at sacred sites varies,” Bernyce writes in her book *Sacred Sites of the West*, “the common bond is that they are clearly distinct and have the ability to influence us on a number of levels: spiritually, mentally, and physically. That is because we are made up of the same components as the rest of the universe, just arranged differently. The life force energies found at power spots seem to act as a bridge between conscious energy and conscious matter.”³

Shamans work with the four elements in much the same way as alchemists. They pay attention to Water, our very life force; they try to feel the Earth, our nurse and mother; they listen to the Wind, the breath of God; and they attempt to touch the Fire of the One Mind that is embedded everywhere. In the parlance of Native Americans, working with the Earth element is known as Earth Medicine, and sacred power spots are marked with cairns and rock formations called medicine wheels that align the location with the rising sun. Native American medicine men connect to the powers of the Above and Below by accessing the One Thing, what the Sioux call the *limen* or the realm of chaos “where power moves freely, untransformed.” After journeying to this hidden realm and mastering the powers of the Other Side, the medicine man returns to share his visions and energy.

Anyone can tap into the powers of the planet by communing with nature regularly, but to reach deep enough to resonate the life forces within ourselves requires deliberate concentration. One approach for working with these powers is the Earth Alchemy meditation, which interprets the four cardinal directions as archetypal pathways or degrees of freedom which define not only our location in space but also our location psychologically and spiritually. In this scheme, the balanced center can be accessed from any of the four directions, and it really does not matter what path one takes as long as one reaches the center, where masculine and feminine forces in our personality can be balanced and the transcendent qualities of spirit and soul can be united. Here's how you can embark on this meditation:

In a field or forest clearing, find a central location and mark it within a circle of rocks or use a natural marker such as a tree stump or boulder. Sit within the circle or near the landmark and face north. Now, relax and contemplate each of the four directions as manifestations of the four elements both within you and in nature. Spend ten minutes or so reflecting on the following qualities of each direction and then turn clockwise to face the next direction. The object is to make the like elements resonate between you and nature.

First, look to the north. According to traditional Native American myth, the north, or polar, direction is associated with the Earth element. It is home to the powers of the Below: night, winter, the hidden sun, the fallen moon, ancestors, ancient wisdom, and unconditional love. It is also home to sacred horned animals, such as the reindeer and the white buffalo, or fantasy creatures like the unicorn. Try to actually feel the archetypal Earth, the dark powers of matter and the planet, as well as what it would be like to be a horned animal surviving in this untamed environment.

Next, turn eastward in the direction of the Air element. It is home to the rising sun, spring, birth, thought, synchronicity, and new beginnings. Out of the golden sky of the east comes the soaring eagle. Try to feel the optimism of the dawn and the freedom and perspective of the eagle. Listen closely to the Wind. Then, turn to the south or equatorial direction, home of the Fire element. This is the direction of the noon sun, summer, childhood, passion, trust, and healing. The archetypes of the noontime sun are embodied in animal totems that include family or den-oriented animals like wolves, coyotes, and mountain lions, as well as domesticated animals like dogs and

cats. Reexperience the warmth of the home fires and the innocence of childhood as you face the source of Fire. Now turn to face the west, home of the Water element. Since the moon appears brightest after the setting of the sun, native cultures connect the lunar presence with the west. The western horizon is the direction of the sunset, fall, maturity, harmony, introspection, deep feelings, and building confidence through meditation. Its totems are ocean-born mammals such as the dolphin and whale or hibernating animals like bears. Try to be especially still while looking west and open yourself to its unconscious, intuitive wisdom. Pay close attention to any signs of Water in the environment.

Finally, return to the north-facing position, but this time, try to feel all the varied energies of the different directions at once. Let them come together within you. This is not a thinking process, so you have to open yourself up and let the elements flow into you and harmonize with the like elements within you. Like our planet itself, you too are made up of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. Like the planet, you too are alive with yet a fifth element. This is the central spot you created on the earth, the one point within you where all of the four elements come together to create the Quintessence, the one living person that you really are. From this position, you can access the powers of the imaginal and spiritual realms in the Above and return to the Earth and matter in the Below, now able to perceive spirit in all things.

The Conjoined Person

Before Conjunction, a person can be lustful and even wanton in seeking his or her “other half” and jealous and possessive once it is found. On the other hand, the conjoined person is appreciative of the alchemical forces at work in relationships and careers, and tends to be considerably kinder and more sensitive to the dynamics of people. Such a person appears balanced and confident, hard to panic, not easily upset, though still very much in touch with his or her feelings. That inner harmony is proof of the balancing of the elements in the alchemist and signifies that he or she is ready to move on to work with the forces of the Above. In an achievement known in psychology

as personal integration, the conjuncted person has found true self-esteem that is not grounded in egocentric lies but derived from experiencing the united essences within. These are the artistic qualities responsible for the success of writers like William Shakespeare, Thomas Mann, and T. S. Eliot, and famous composers like Peter Tchaikovsky, Johannes Brahms, and Ludwig van Beethoven.

The alchemists associated the operation of Conjunction with the virile bull and assigned the astrological cipher of Taurus to signify this operation. The Apis bull was sacred to the ancient Egyptians. They believed it was born in the dark of the moon and they drew the round head of the bull with the crescent moon to identify it. The Egyptians used the appearance of this sign in the heavens to mark the coupling of cattle and oxen to begin plowing. This Earth sign is symbolic of masculine strength, virility, planning, and bull-headedness. The search of the Taurian is for meaning and value in life, and people born under the constellation of the Bull are full of resolve and lack any self-doubt, which can lead to them to being steadfast and even pigheaded. They expect to be rewarded for everything they do and can be overly possessive, but Taurians can also be very patient and dependable. These are qualities of strong leadership, and this sign has produced many famous and infamous people, such as Adolf Hitler, Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Ho Chi Minh, Ayatollah Khomeini, Saddam Hussein, Golda Meir, Malcolm X, and Harry Truman. Actors Orson Welles, Al Pacino, and Barbra Streisand were also born under the sign of the Bull.

There can be no doubt that Conjunctions are powerful events in a person's spiritual progress, giving us the power of the bull to carry on despite obstacles. The coming together of soul and spirit takes place on the border between physical and spiritual reality and represents a focusing of self that can unleash enormous psychic energy. But Conjunctions—like all marriages—tend to break down over time. In order for the inner marriage to succeed in the long run, there must be an infusion of energy and will from a higher level. That living inspiration from the Above is what the alchemists called Fermentation.

¹ The first quote is from Eugenio d'Ors in his *La Vida Angelica (The Life of the Angelic)*, Madrid, 1523), and the second is from Heinrich Suso in his *Die Ewige Weisheit (The Eternal Wisdom)*, Nuremberg, 1435). Suso was the defender of Meister Eckhart against the church in the 1330s.

2 Portions of Dr. Dell Sokol's study on transcendent sex were published in Georg Feuerstein, ed., *Enlightened Sexuality: Essays on Body-Positive Spirituality* (Freedom, California: Crossing Press, 1989). Practical guides to sexual alchemy include Mantak Chia and Michael Winn, *Taoist Secrets of Love: Cultivating Male Sexual Energy* (New York: Aurora Press, 1985) and Dr. Louis William Meldman, *Mystical Sex* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1997).

3 A listing of sacred sites can be found in Bernyce Barlow's *Sacred Sites of the West* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1996) and James Swan's *Sacred Places: How the Living Earth Seeks Our Friendship* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear & Co., 1990). My own *Haunted Places: The National Directory* (New York: Penguin, 1996) lists 2,000 locations considered power sites or places of paranormal activity.



Chapter 15 FERMENTATION: FIRE IN THE SOUL

The Peacock Spreads Its Tail

Until now, all the operations of alchemy have been performed in the lower realm, on Earth. While the first four operations of transformation (Calcination, Dissolution, Separation, and Conjunction) use the powers of the personal unconscious and the energies of the personality, the next three (Fermentation, Distillation, and Coagulation) tap into the infinite resources of the collective unconscious and the transpersonal Self. Initially, the conjuncted child of the king and queen is still tied to earth and polluted with remnants of ego. For the Child of the Philosophers to survive, an appeal to the heavenly powers must be made, and Fermentation must take place from the Above.

Like its biological counterpart, alchemical Fermentation is a compound operation that occurs in two parts. First comes a distasteful phase known as Putrefaction, in which the matter is allowed to rot and decompose. Most often, the alchemists added manure to their “matter” to help get the process going. Next, true Fermentation would begin, in which the dead material seems to come alive again with the influx of digesting bacteria. This new life changes the fundamental nature of the material in what the alchemists saw as a process of spiritization. The indwelling “spirit” is then removed from the fermented solution by Distillation. The chemical signal that Fermentation is taking place is a rainbow display of colors that the alchemists named the “Peacock’s Tail.” Chemically, this is the iridescent film of oil that forms on putrefying organic material or the multicolored skin that often forms on molten metals like lead. In mythology, the peacock was considered sacred to Juno, the Roman goddess of lunar light and protector of childbirth, and in medieval Europe, peacocks were known for their ability to fight snakes and consume or neutralize their poisons. Eating the peacock’s flesh became synonymous with integrating the many colors of the alchemical opus. The

ever-shifting colors of the Peacock's Tail represent the true light of spiritual initiation, our first glimpse into the astral realm. This is exactly what happens in shamanic initiations where eating the "flesh of the gods"—taking psychoactive plants—is equivalent to seeing through the eyes of the gods or to having visions and making the connection to the divine mind through the imagination. Even in such psychedelic experiences, however, a forceful Putrefaction of the ego occurs before the ecstasy of Fermentation begins.

During psychological Putrefaction, the expired product of the Conjunction is exposed to the heated moisture of our deepest and most clinging psychic components—the psychological manure in which most of us wallow. As the alchemist tries to apply the principles of his new Conjunction, he soon discovers that he is still all too human. This deep realization of one's inherent deficiencies initiates a mortification and decomposition of ego, and quite often at this point, a mental depression—a black mood—settles over the alchemist, and there is an extinction of all interest in life. The alchemists understood that sometimes what is perceived as spirit is really just an inflation of the ego. Only by psychological mortification can it be certain that the tyrant king is really slain, that any traces of ego are annihilated. Instead of reaching for the Prozac, however, the spiritual adept suffers through this darkest stage, knowing that it represents a period of fundamental internal regeneration. The sickly child resulting from the union of the king and queen must now decompose and become a "blacker-than-black" substance. This is the dark night of the soul, a diminishment of consciousness in which the alchemist must persist to achieve enlightenment or relax into the dull slumber of mere physical existence. The sign that Putrefaction is nearing its end is the appearance of a milky white liquid on the blackened, rotting material. Spiritually, this is the white light of resurrection on the Other Side, just visible through a tunnel or cave, that indicates our consciousness has survived. This is symbolized by the White Swan, which spends most of its time gliding across the tranquil surface of still waters—waters that run deep and represent the soul's interface with the physical world.



*The preliminary Putrefaction is watched over by Saturn and Death.
(Daniel Mylius, Philosophia Reformata, Frankfurt 1622)*

Alchemical drawings of Putrefaction also depict birds descending from a pitch black sky, skeletons standing guard over coffins or black boxes, or a snake crucified on a cross. Other images of Putrefaction include corpses, graves, coffins, massacres, mutilation, worms, dung beetles, rotting flesh, as well as sowing and germination, greenness and rebirth. The reason for the conflicting scenes is that in this case, death is not extinction but a possible resurrection. For example, dung beetles burrow into animal defecation and create a giant ball of feces which they roll back to their underground dens. The alchemical significance of this act was not missed by the Egyptians, who worshipped the beetle as the sacred Scarab, which sought the Stone in the most rejected substances. According to the phonetic Cabala, the esoteric

meaning of the word scarab is “dweller in the secret land of fire” or “secret enclosed fire,” which refers to the ouroboric Secret Fire that is the greatest tool of the alchemists. It was that great esoteric truth that the Egyptians thought was duplicated in the Below in the Herculean labors of the lowly dung beetle.

Appropriately, the tarot card for the Putrefaction phase is the Death card, which in most interpretations is not associated with physical death but instead signifies the beginning of a new stage in the life of the supplicant. Psychological death or the killing of ego allows the inner incubation or inspiration of another spirit, so that the personality will be reborn with a new psychic center. It is here that “Monk’s Pride”—believing one is spiritually superior to others—can destroy the Work. That is why, all along, the creation of egoless consciousness is one of the major goals of alchemy.

In contrast to the Black Stage of the first four operations and the White Stage of initial Putrefaction, successful Fermentation heralds the start of the Yellow stage in the experiment. It is the first hint that we are actually making gold. While the harsh flames of Calcination come from the emotions and bodily energy, the invigorating golden warmth of Fermentation comes from the union of inspira-tion Above and imagination Below. As we saw in chapter 7 (“Separate the Earth from Fire”), this is a state of consciousness the alchemists called their Secret Fire, and it requires opening up to the higher realms and accepting the reality of transpersonal forces. This realization occurs on the level of society also. Though the church issued a formal warning against his ideas, the Jesuit philosopher Teilhard de Chardin taught the notion of a spiritual alchemy in which mankind was evolving toward union with God, which he named the Omega Point. Teilhard believed that Fermentation took place through the love of God and would occur on a social as well as individual level. “Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity,” he said, “we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for the second time in the history of the world, man will discover Fire.”



The integrated self lies dormant in the darkness of Putrefaction as the life-bringing Secret Fire engulfs it. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfurt 1617)

Because Fermentation involves the use of the Secret Fire of the inspired imagination, its symbols are more diverse than the other stages of alchemy. One of these symbols is the Rebis (a two-headed Siamese twin), which refers to the incomplete result of the previous Conjunction as well as the dual processes of Putrefaction and gentle heating from the Secret Fire that make up Fermentation. The color green is often associated with successful Fermentation, such as the Green Lion, which represents the resurrected

personality, and a giant green emerald, which represents the inspiration of the Emerald Tablet itself. Images of Fermentation in progress include ladders, thunderstorms, lightning, sexual activity inside a blackened vessel, grapes or wine barrels, and even the landing of UFOs. The tarot cards for Fermentation are both Hermes figures: the Hermit, the “little Hermes,” who seeks the solitude of meditation, and the Magician or Hierophant, the Hermes guide who takes us into other realms. This is the first appearance of Hermes in the Work, at the edge of reality just as we seek entry into the Above. He will return again at the end of our journey, to guide us once more to our home Below, where there is still Work to be done with other people.

Alchemical engravings of the concluding phase of Fermentation show a bird descending into water in which there is a black toad waiting, two birds nesting in a tree, an alchemist waiting patiently for changes to take place in a vessel, or a farmer sowing gold coins in a field. This last scene implies that it takes a seed of real gold to make gold, or we must expose our own spirit to receive an influx of spirit from the Above. Physically, this step is the union of body with soul and spirit—a sacred event which is sometimes symbolized by a yellow bird descending into a multicolored sea. That yellow bird is the golden thought of the One Mind, expressed in the light of the True Imagination, and it embodies the Word that transforms the One Thing. “The Breath of God vibrated upon the face of the Water,” said Cabalist Langford Garstin in *Theurgy, or the Hermetic Practice* (London: Rider & Co., 1930), “coming forth as Light and the true fermental principle.” In the same way, the mind of man can be fermented from the Above, and the experience is one of intense illumination.

My Fermentation: Touching the Light

Sometimes the operations of alchemy repeat themselves in our lives in an ever-widening spiral of transformation and understanding. The Fermentation experience responsible for the “esoteric bent” in my life came while I was still a young boy, and, like Parsifal in the Grail legend, I was too foolish to grasp its meaning. Looking back at the experience, I remember it all started

with the wind.

One day a stubborn breeze kicked up from out of nowhere, and I watched as it moved across the deserted prairie behind our house like waves of goosebumps over the tall grass. There was something intriguing about that wind, and I left the security of our backyard to follow the invisible intruder. I was seven years old at the time, and we had just moved to the country from an apartment in South Chicago. My parents left the city partly in the hope that fresh air and sunshine would speed my recovery from a devastating illness.

I had contracted a deadly form of hepatitis from an unsterile hypodermic needle during a vaccination, and within days my liver swelled to three times its normal size and started interfering with the functioning of my other organs. The doctors gave me a fifty-fifty chance of surviving, though after three months of trying to fight off the infection, I was ready to give up anyway. I remember having no energy for even the most trivial amusements, and I really started looking the part of a dying person. My skin took on a sickening yellow hue, my eye sockets were dark and sunken, and, to make things worse, I insisted on wearing black or dark blue clothes all the time. Inside, I was experiencing the death of my nascent ego, and I became passive and withdrawn. There was just not much in the world I really cared about anymore, and maybe that is how I became sensitized to hidden things.

After our family escaped from Chicago to the country, I was transfixed by nature and spent hours silently walking the extensive prairie lands. Being outdoors brought me back to life. In fact, the earth literally nursed me back to health. For some reason, I started drinking the cloudy white sap of milkweed thistles, even though several people warned me it was poisonous. Years later, I learned that the plant is the source of silymarin, which is marketed as a liver restorer, but at the time I had only an instinctive relationship with the odd-looking weed. That summer, when the prickly milkweed thistles burst and scattered their white silky seeds over the field, I felt the same life force surging through me. So I was not surprised nor did I resist the pregnant breeze that appeared that day. I followed it deep into heart of the prairie, farther than I had ever gone before, to a great and solitary oak tree, where the breeze abruptly disappeared into a gaping hole in the ground. Where the hole came from, I had no idea, but it exposed the prairie's flesh-colored clay to a depth of about eight feet. The smell of the fresh earth was so strong that it

nearly choked me, yet there was something beautiful and beguiling about that hole. I had the uncontrollable urge to leap into it, and I stood teetering at the edge for the longest time.

To this day, I am not sure what happened next. It was as if there were two great holes, one in the ground and another in me, and by our similarity or correspondences, we somehow merged. Our boundaries had fused, and I stood there unable to move at all. Suddenly, halfway up the hole, something started happening. It began as a soft white ball of light hovering in the middle of the hole and evolved into a swirling mass of brilliant colors. Caught in the throes of some unseen centripetal force, the colors submerged and resurfaced in mindboggling chaos. Then, after a minute or so, patterns started emerging from within the dancing ball. At first the swirling designs lasted only for the blink of an eye, but gradually they coalesced into crisp octagonal shapes that floated about on the surface. I thought it must be some sort of intelligence making the beautiful patterns, like an angel or fairy or something, but then it dawned on me that the ball of light was not a being of any kind but a *thing*—a most wonderful thing. Excited and enthralled, I gradually faced a terrifying possibility. Sensing the globular rainbow's power and separateness from me, I had the overwhelming desire to let it take me. For the first time since encountering the object, I felt fear—not of it but of something inside me that wanted to jump into the hole and merge completely with the incredible light form. I wanted this powerful force, whatever it was, to take me home with it, and as I stood on the edge of the precipice, I was torn between wanting to jump and wanting to run away.

Then, from out of nowhere, I heard my mother's voice calling me. It could not have been her, since I was miles from home, yet I heard her yell my name, fetching me home, offering the mundane comforts of television, dinner, and Dad. Forcibly, I yanked my mind back to earth and pulled myself from the edge of the hole. At that point, something automatic took over, because I was still thinking about the hole but could feel myself running as fast as I could until I reached our backyard. Traipsing over our neatly groomed garden, I leapt up the stairs into the kitchen and embraced my mother and my parents' structured world both at the same time. But I never said a word to anyone about the spinning ball of light in the hole in the middle of the prairie.

Why was I afraid to tell anyone? For one thing, I had no idea how to

put it in words, and if I had, I think I might have used made-up images like the Virgin Mary or a UFO to try to capture its splendor. Though I told no one, I frequently thought about the incident, trying to find some explanation for what happened. Was I hallucinating from too much milkweed? Did I suffer a brain seizure? Did I have some sort of near-death experience? Was I going insane or suppressing memories of being molested or even abducted by someone or something? I spent years researching the paranormal and mystical experiences of others, only to find many similar accounts but no real explanation for the otherworldly reality I had witnessed. Only when I discovered the Emerald Tablet did I recognize the pattern of the One Thing and discover the universal processes responsible for my experience and others like it. Today, I see this hidden alchemy at work everywhere, and as far as I am concerned, the whole planet is being fermented for an ultimate Coagulation of spirit from which none of us will be able to turn and run away.¹

Working with the Higher Elements in Fermentation

The higher forces necessary to achieve Fermentation are represented by the celestial substances of Sulfur and Mercury. In the last three steps of transformation, these two substances work together to perfect the Stone. In fact, according to Carl Jung, the principles of Sulfur and Mercury are indistinguishable at higher levels in the Work and merge into one another. This too is the meaning of the Ouroboros, in which the forces of Sulfur and Mercury, yang and yin, flow eternally into one another. For the alchemists, the goal on all three levels of the Work at this stage was to permanently fuse Sulfur and Mercury to create the Stone.

They called Sulfur the “Father of the Metals” and saw it as a fiery and active Sol that combined the elements of Fire and Air, the qualities of hot and dry. It represented the willpower and passion of the alchemist and the solid, nonvolatile component of the metals and the ultimate Stone. “As burning and corrosive,” noted Carl Jung in his *Alchemical Studies* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), “it is hostile to the Stone, but cleansed of

its impurities, it is the matter of our Stone.” Those impurities can be sensed in the sulfurous odors that arise during initial Putrefaction required for Fermentation to take place. According to the *Lexicon of Alchemy*, the principle of Sulfur can only be purified and not removed from a body: “the internal Sulfur is that which makes and prepares the body and cannot be separated from it.” The alchemical symbol for impure Sulfur was the Red Lion and for purified Sulfur the White Lion.

Alchemists called Mercury the “Mother of the Metals” and saw it as a watery and passive Luna that combined the elements of Water and Earth, the qualities of moist and cold. It represented the imagination, inspiration, and intuition of the alchemist and the liquid, volatile component of the metals and the Stone. The *Lexicon of Alchemy* defined it as a “living active spiritual principle which can be rarefied.” Unlike Sulfur, which exists in two solid states (pure and impure), Mercury is triform and can exist in all three states. As a solid, Mercury is an amalgam with other metals or solidified by sulfur in the mineral cinnabar. As a liquid metal at room temperature, the alchemists considered it dissolved gold. As a gas or vapor, Mercury was the all-powerful spirit of the metals. Thus, like Hermes, the metal Mercury was thrice-greatest. Its numerous symbols include the Green Lion, the Fugitive Stag, a naked youth, the caduceus, fountains, a winged dragon or serpent, dew, virgin’s milk, and seeds or sperm.

The fusion of Sulfur and Mercury, will and imagination, is the key to the entire Work. In working with these two substances, it is Sulfur that fixes or coagulates Mercury, and the methods of personal Fermentation include intense prayer and fasting, vivid visualization, and fervent meditation. The purpose of such efforts is to establish a connection with a higher source. That infusion from the Above can be accomplished consciously by combining our break with the world with alchemistic meditation. The *Lexicon of Alchemy* defines meditation as “the internal talk of one person with another who is invisible, as in the invocation of the deity, or communion with one’s self, or with one’s good angel.” This describes genuine alchemistic meditation, whose creative dialog is the means by which things pass from an unconscious potential to conscious actuality. For most alchemists, that internal dialog was with Hermes, their guide to the subtle realities. His instructions to separate “the Earth Fire” means to change the gross into the subtle, the tangible into the imaginal. It means using the Secret Fire of the True Imagination to

change the existential situation into its transcendental foundation.

Fasting is an age-old method for divorcing one's materiality and invoking higher powers. "If you do not fast to the world," warns the Gospel of Thomas, "you will not find the Kingdom." The two kinds of alchemical fasting are defined by how they last. The purifying Calcining Fast lasts at least five days and causes the metabolic fires to attack one's fat and tissues in a kind of ouroboric feeding. Such fasting can produce profound changes in the body and mind in a short time. Hallucinations and visions are common, and after twenty days, the body reverts to an androgynous state in which men start to lactate and women grow facial hair and stop menstruating. The Calcining Fast even results in an "ashen" appearance that was so intimately associated with holiness that, according to the Bible, Jewish rabbis sometimes powdered their faces to give them that ashen look.

The less strict Fermenting Fast, on the other hand, lasts at least three days and allows a variety of sustaining fruit and vegetable juices to sustain the metabolism. The goal of this kind of fast is to make a break with worldly habits and sensations and attempt to switch over to pranic or spiritual forces. This gentle form of self-denial is an invocation to higher powers, a sacrifice made for the good of the whole being, and is the type of fasting practiced by Native Americans on vision quests. Most of us have confronted the monsters from the deep that appear in nightmares after we go to bed with a full stomach. Perhaps going to bed with an empty stomach has the opposite effect. After all, nineteenth-century physicians considered the stomach our "second brain," in which the physical effects of our emotions and thoughts are often expressed as cramps and ulcers. Many alchemists, such as Isaac Newton, refused to eat anything when caught up in the inspired state of Fermentation. In any case, the tool of the Fermenting Fast is only useful alchemically if it brings us to the edge of our personal reality and opens up an infusion of forces from the Above. In the case of the Fermenting Fast, the Secret Fire is as much a metabolic process as it is a type of consciousness.

The Inner Light of Transformation

Thomas Vaughan (1621-1665), the twin brother of mystical poet Henry Vaughan, is considered one of the most gifted metaphysical alchemists. In his writings under the pseudonym Eirenaeus Philalethes, he revealed much about the Secret Fire of Fermentation. “After Putrefaction,” he wrote in *Coelum Terrae (The Earth of Heaven)*, London, 1650, “appears the [solar] sperm or Influx of the Sun [the Peacock’s Tail], which is the father of it. It is a quick, Celestial Fire, incorporated in a thin, oily, airy moisture. It is incombustible, for it is a Fire itself and feeds on Fire; and the longer it stays in the fire, the more glorious it grows.” He elaborated in *Lumen de Lumine (Light of Lights)*, London, 1651) that “Fire, notwithstanding the diversities of it in this sublunary kitchen of the elements, is but One Thing from one root, and what we call our Secret Fire is at the root of all things both visible and invisible. It is in Water, Earth, and Air; it is in minerals, herbs, and beasts; it is in men, stars, and angels. But originally it is in God Himself, for He is the Fountain of Fire.”

The Celestial Fire spoken of by Thomas Vaughan is the same baptism by fire of which Jesus spoke. The first baptism by water gives us repentance and purification and was called the Lesser Work by the alchemists. The Greater Work is achieving the second baptism, the influx of spirit and vision from the divine Mind. This Secret Fire is the inspired act that makes the Work real, and the longer the matter at hand stays in this Fire, the more glorious it grows. In Jungian terms, this type of active imagination eventually produces a third thing, the Ferment, that leads to a new level of being, a true incarnation that one alchemist defined as the “concentrated awareness of real imagining.” Said Dr. Jung:

The concept of *Imaginatio* is the most important key to understanding the Opus. We have to conceive of these imaginal processes not as the immaterial phantoms that we readily take fantasy pictures to be, but as something corporeal, a subtle body. The *Imaginatio*, or the act of imagining, was a physical activity that could be fit into the cycle of material changes—an activity that brought these about and was brought about by them in turn. The alchemist related himself not only to the unconscious but directly to the very substance (the First Matter) that he hoped to transform through the power of imagination. The act of imagining is therefore a concentrated extract of life forces, a hybrid of the physical and psychic. So the demand that the alchemist must have a sound physical constitution is quite intelligible, since he works

with and through his own essence and is himself the indispensable condition of his experiment. There was no mind/matter split in the heyday of alchemy, but there existed an intermediate realm between mind and matter—a psychic realm of subtle bodies—whose characteristic is to manifest themselves in a mental as well as a material form. The moment when physics touches the untrodden, untreadable regions—and when psychology too touches the impenetrable darkness—then the intermediate realm of subtle bodies comes to life again, and the physical and psychic are once more blended in an indissoluble unity.²

The Entheogenic Hermes

The intermediate realm of which Dr. Jung spoke is home to Hermes, patron of the alchemists, but he comes to us in unexpected ways, wearing many different guises. The term “entheogen,” coined in the 1970s by consciousness researchers, literally means to “generate the god within” and refers to a class of naturally occurring compounds that reveal an indwelling divinity and evoke numinous experiences. Shamans have traditionally referred to these sacred plant derivatives as “allies,” and it seems probable that at least some alchemists were making use of their own Hermetic “allies” to ensure Fermentation. A few researchers have suggested that the iridescent display of colors known as the Peacock’s Tail that signals successful Fermentation is psychedelic in origin, and the Secret Fire, the state of consciousness imbued with images, was kindled by chemicals.

We must remember that the alchemists always worked on three levels at once: spiritual, psychological, and physical. On the physical level, they were the first chemists and admittedly discovered several mind-altering substances. The alchemists were the first to distill “spirits” and make alcoholic beverages. In fact, Raymond Lully, whose personal Distillation experience we studied in chapter 8 (“The Greatest Force of All Powers”), was the first person to make brandy. He fermented wine in horse manure for three weeks then distilled the resulting concoction. Lully recommended that his “burnt wine” be given to soldiers going into to battle to “encourage their minds.” Paracelsus, one of

the most respected alchemists of all time, enthusiastically prescribed a plant essence he named *laudanum*— that we now call opium.

It is also known that Tantric alchemists used a mind-altering drug called *soma*, and their European counterparts probably also experimented with psychoactive compounds. In searching for the Elixir, unsuspecting alchemists imbibed many substances whose effects were unknown. For instance, the metal “antimony” got its name when the monks to whom alchemist Basil Valentine gave it got deathly sick, making the metal’s Signature “antimonk.” Medieval “hexing herbs,” such as belladonna, thorn apple, mandrake, and henbane, could all produce hallucinatory effects, and marijuana and poppy seeds were well known for their calmative effects. Several types of psilocybin mushrooms grew in cow or horse dung in Europe, and ergot, a purple mold that grows on rye, contains LSD. Its effects were documented in several bizarre epidemics of ergot poisoning, called St. Anthony’s Fire, that claimed thousands of lives in Europe. However, if these or similar drugs were known and used by the alchemists, they kept it secret and no direct references to such compounds have ever been found. Certainly, had the alchemists used psychoactive compounds, they would have approached them in the sacred way of shamans traveling to nonordinary reality in search of spiritual truth and not in the “recreational” use we see today.



Spirit and soul prepare for Fermentation as the alchemist plants gold

coins and an angel harkens them to the Other Side. (Daniel Mylius, Philosophia Reformata, Frankfurt 1622)

“According to this viewpoint,” says ethnobotanist Terence McKenna of the shamanic experience, “the world has a center, and when you go to the center—which is inside yourself—there is a vertical axis that allows you to travel up or down. There are celestial worlds, there are infernal worlds, there are paradisiacal worlds. These are the worlds that open up to us on our shamanic journeys, and I believe we have an obligation to explore these domains and pass that information on to others. At this time in our history, it’s perhaps the most awe-inspiring journey anyone could hope to make.”³

It is not surprising that the hidden world the shamans have discovered is the same one described in the Emerald Tablet. Though the shamans call him their “ally,” it is really Hermes, once again, who is their guide. Hermes’ Seven Steps are the levels of consciousness through which the shaman journeys, and the Emerald Tablet is his roadmap for a safe trip. In all types of psychedelic encounters, after the magic substance is ingested the experiencer faces a paranoid period of apprehension as the drug “comes” for him. The successful candidate convinces himself that this black phase will not last and endures the onslaught of ruthless forces that lie ahead. In brutal chemical Calcination, the drug overwhelms the experiencer’s ego and melts away his defenses and attachments to the world in complete personal Dissolution. As the experiencer recovers from the initial onslaught, he instinctively tries to reassemble himself and picks up the remaining essences of his consciousness during Separation. Then he or she attempts to bring them back together in a viable Conjunction that can survive without ego. All appears lost, however, as the progress of the drug continues, and the experiencer temporarily loses consciousness during Putrefaction. When he regains consciousness after Fermentation has begun, it is on an entirely new level. At first overcome by dazzling lights and energy patterns that seem alive, the experiencer gets his bearings in a process of Distillation, in which he moves up and down along the vertical axis of reality. He soon discovers that action follows thought and realizes that he can direct his center of consciousness anywhere within any realm if he remains pure enough, uncontaminated by matter and ego. The simple realization of this new freedom completes the Coagulation of his entire being in a body of ecstatic light.

Capturing the Fermental Light

Most people prefer to work with the Secret Fire under much less blazing conditions than those found in the psychedelic experience. The lesson of alchemy is that the light of the Secret Fire experienced in mystical visions, meaningful dreams, near-death and out-of-body experiences, and paranormal encounters, as well as psychedelically, is the same. That Fermental Light can be accessed by anyone to overthrow the hold of ego—without the use of harsh drugs—if we follow the steps of the Emerald Formula in meditation. “Separate the Earth from Fire,” Hermes tells us, and that is exactly what the Fermental Light can do. This light is always close at hand and only the veil of our assumptions of materiality needs to be lifted to see it.

Let’s do a very simple experiment in personal Fermentation. First, sit back in a comfortable chair, fold your hands in your lap and relax; then, close your eyes and concentrate on the first image that pops into your mind. Do not be concerned if it is something you have just seen or if there is no image at all. Give it a little time and allow that image, or pattern, or blankness, or whatever, to change and grow. Pay attention to the morphing image and try to remember as many details about the scene as you can. Now, ask yourself a question or think about a problem, something you really want to know, and see what happens. Observe how the image alters itself, what symbols appear, and what the final version looks like. Open your eyes again. Simply report to yourself what you saw in as much detail as you can remember.

If you visualized someone from the office lying naked on your waterbed, you have probably missed the point. The idea is not to engage our fantasies but to allow images to rise on their own from an unconscious source. This is the True Imagination of which the alchemists spoke. Try it again at a later time if your images are being driven by wish-fulfillment or from instincts such as visions of a juicy hamburger if you have missed lunch. Part of the curse of modern man is that he confuses fantasy for the amazing power of True Imagination and thus relegates both to the psychic trash heap. However, during this exercise, you might have seen something that you had not previously noticed or something which an independent part of your mind was still dwelling on. Or you might have seen something unexpected or allowed the image to become fluid and were able to communicate with that

independent part. In such cases, you need to interpret what was seen and how it changed when you asked your question.

For instance, at a recent lecture I gave on the alchemy of management, one of the executives present saw himself seated at his desk and asked what the “hidden truth” was in the project he was working on at the time. The next thing he saw was his narrow navy-blue tie stretch into a bib-sized emblem full of swirling, multicolored lines that were constantly changing. He quipped that the neon colors of his new tie were so loud he could almost hear them, and he was obviously uncomfortable with the colorful image. What did the image of the tie mean? We must ask ourselves what a tie symbolizes to a man. Women get to dress in a much wider variety of clothes than men. In fact, the only way a man in a suit can express his inner being is through his tie. That is why there are so many thousands of different ties on the market, and why a man shopping for a tie can be as picky as any woman shopping for a dress. His tie is the only way a man wearing the uniform of business can show the colors of his soul. While our executive wanted to project the image of a conservative, solid businessman, his True Imagination revealed there was something else inside of him that was stifled and wanted to be expressed. That was the “hidden truth” of the “project” on which he was working. His only real project, like that of all of us, is the greater Work of alchemy.

The fluid, momentary light experienced in this little alchemy experiment is the same Fermental Light with which mystics and mediums try to connect. This internal vision quest can be expanded to become a significant part of our lives. If we work at it, it can put us in contact with a deeply truthful intelligence within ourselves that we never knew existed. In fact, the alchemists measured a person’s mental health by the degree to which imagery was used—by how well nourished was his or her imagination.

The Fermented Person

Before Fermentation, a person can appear hopelessly depressed, passive, and unreliable. The alchemists called this fertile precondition “digestion,” or Putrefaction, and connected it with the worldly and proud Fire sign of Leo,

with whom the Egyptians associated their lion-headed god of the midday sun (expressed as Sekhmet, Ra, and the Aten in the various dynasties). The search of the Leo person is for living wholeness, and generally Leos are known for their power, confidence, and domineering personality, though that all comes crashing down during Putrefaction. Famous people born under the sign of the Lion include Napoleon Bonaparte, Benito Mussolini, Yasser Arafat, Norman Lear, Peter O'Toole, Robert Mitchum, Whitney Houston, Delta Burke, Robert DeNiro, Roman Polanski, and Bill Clinton.

Once fermented, a person becomes suddenly alive and irrepressibly hopeful because their attention is diverted from this world to something higher. In many people, their awareness and creative or imaginative abilities seem to skyrocket. Successful Fermentation is the quality we envy in great painters like Michelangelo, Vincent van Gogh, and Claude Monet. As we can see from the lives of these artists, living with a powerful alchemical force that demands expression is not always easy. "I get loopy if I'm not creative for very long," admitted folk singer Pete Droge, "and nasty and short-tempered if I'm not working on my music. I've been that way for some time. In an interview I read recently, Roseanne Cash likened the creative muse to an energy that becomes toxic if it doesn't get used. It's like an energy inside an artist, and if you neglect it and don't put it to use, it becomes harmful."⁴

The alchemists assigned the astrological cipher for Capricorn to stand for the process of Fermentation. The Earth sign of Capricorn, whose animals are both the goat and the unicorn, represents both the most basic and the highest impulses and the worst and the best in us. This alpha-and-omega sign of the zodiac appears at the beginning and end of the Work. The search of the Capricorn person, therefore, is for the One Thing in the Work, and in many ways, Capricorn is the Ouroboros. Capricorn's apparent dichotomy also signifies the two basic processes of Fermentation—the descent into the death of Putrefaction and the return to life during Fermentation. The leaden or negative aspects of the first sign of the year are lack of imagination, inability to take criticism, and refusal to change. The golden or positive characteristics are inspirational control, industriousness, steadiness, and taking responsibility. Capricorn individuals are upholders of tradition and authority, though often that makes them tied to the events of the past and oriented to the status symbols of the present. Al Capone, J. Edgar Hoover, Richard Nixon,

Aristotle Onassis, Rush Limbaugh, and Jim Bakker were all born under the sign of the Goat.

During Fermentation an exaltation of the normal powers of the imagination takes place. Chemically, the connection between the powers of the Above and the Below that occurs during Fermentation is expressed as a thick yellow fluid that “flows like wax.” This is the physical Ferment, the matter imbued with the Sun’s color and perfection, the first expression of the spiritual gold that is the final product of the Work. To make absolutely sure that no traces of imperfection remain, however, the Ferment must undergo the most rigorous and repeated Distillation before it can be reborn on a higher level.

[1](#) This experience is described in several articles and poems I have written. “Prairie God” was published in the *Special Poets’ Series Vol. II* (Waynesboro, Tennessee: Yes Press, 1991). “Summer Wind” was published in *In the Company of Poets*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (Summer 1991) and in *Down Peaceful Paths* (Minot, North Dakota: Quill Books, 1991). “William Tells” appeared in *Perceptions* (Lewisville, Texas: D & K Publishing, vol. 1 no. 1, 1992).

[2](#) From C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, Bollingen Series XX (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980).

[3](#) From chapter 17 of Terence McKenna, *The Archaic Revival* (San Francisco, California: HarperCollins, 1991). Other books dealing with entheogens include Jim DeKorne, *Psychedelic Shamanism* (Port Townsend, Washington: Loompanics Unlimited, 1994); Richard Schultes and Albert Hofmann, *Plants of the Gods* (New York: Alfred van der Marck, 1987); and Clark Heinrich, *Strange Fruit: Alchemy, Religion and Magical Foods* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995).

[4](#) From an interview by Sirona Knight and Michael Starwyn published in *Magical Blend* 54 (Spring 1997). Pete Droge’s latest album is *Find a Door* on American Recordings.



Chapter 16

DISTILLATION: CONSECRATION OF THE STONE

Sacrifice of the Pelican

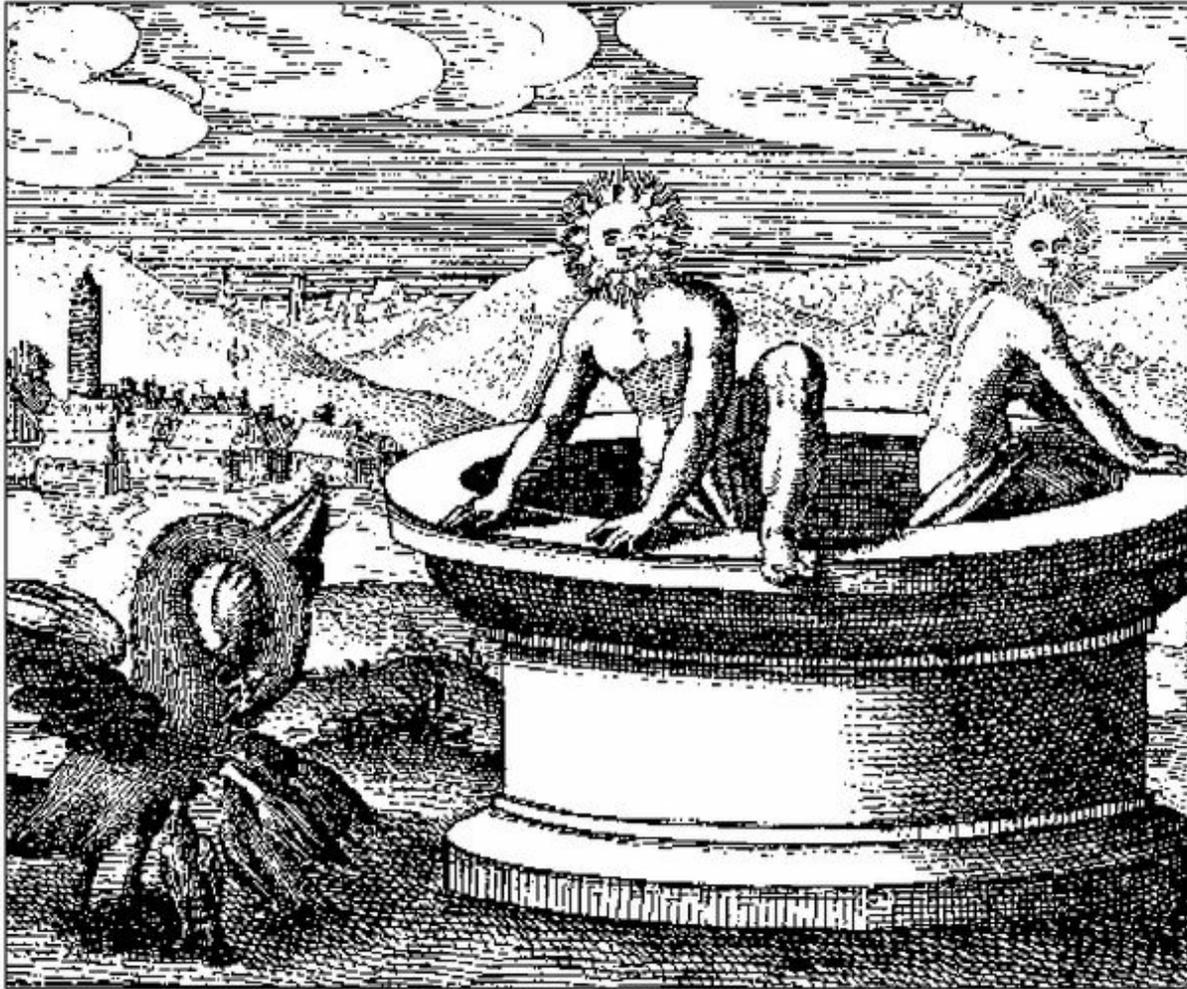
If Fermentation is successful, the next step in the process of alchemical transformation is Distillation. In chemical terms, the Ferment, which is a yellow balsam or waxy substance, is purified by forced vaporizations and repeated washings. The alchemist attempts to wash away all that is inferior in order to receive what the Emerald Tablet calls “the powers of both the Above and the Below.” This repeated Distillation produces an extremely concentrated solution known as the “Mother of the Stone.” Sometimes it is possible to pass from this dense solution directly into a solid state through sublimation. This occurs when heating the solidified substance causes it to pass directly into a vaporous state and ascend to the top of the retort where it resolidifies on the cooler surface as a highly purified form of the original.

Psychologically, the white stage of Distillation is a repeated separation and recombination of the subtle and the gross aspects of the personality. This process continues until peace and well-being bond to the personality in what would be the corresponding sublimation. In spiritual terms, Distillation is a rejuvenating immersion in the womb of the primal forces of the universe that marks the final death of the old ego and the rebirth of the transpersonal Self. Like a seed that can produce more seeds after it has sprouted and ripened, the feeble product of the original Conjunction multiplies in strength and perfection. There is a “rain” of purified matter, and successive exhaltations of the material gradually produce what the alchemists called the “Mercurial Water,” which symbolizes mental elements and former complexes freely suspended in the collective unconscious. Cabalistic alchemist Adolphe Franck provided an overview of the Distillation process in his *La Kabbale*:

After the subtilation [Fermentation] of the matter, there follows its elevation or sublimation [Distillation], the spiritual parts being raised up by

the action of heat, which also acts upon all the feces and decaying parts, those dregs we are told not to despise, but carefully to preserve, rendering them more subtle than before, penetrating them and preparing them to receive back the volatile, spiritual part at a later stage. It is our [Secret] Fire which is the Ferment or coagulating agent in the final preparation of the Work, imparting the pure form of our Philosophic Gold. Distillation removes the Water, that is the soul and spirit, leaving the body as a *Caput Mortuum* [literally, “dead head” or “stoned”] which is, nevertheless, not to be despised, for it also is made perfect by the subsequent action of our [Secret] Fire. This will take place in the reunion or Coagulation, for the power of the subtle is not integral, as Hermes says, until it be turned into Earth.¹

One of the most popular of the medieval Distillation devices was nicknamed the Pelican, a glass retort with two tubes connecting the neck with the body. The result is a reflux still in which the mixture is boiled and vapors condense in the neck, then flow back into the retort through the tubes. This circulatory process produced a very pure essence from the original mixture. In alchemical drawings depicting this operation, the Pelican bird is usually shown pecking herself in her chest in order to feed her young, which are usually gathered at her feet lapping up her fresh blood. Like the Pelican, the alchemist must nourish the spiritual child with his own soul by surrendering his old self. Like the blood of Christ, this represents an act of redemption through sacrifice, and what is sacrificed at this point is the alchemist’s earthly nature, his dearly held emotions and ego-centered beliefs. This can be an extremely painful process indeed.



A pelican sacrifices its lifeblood for its young, as the king and queen emerge cleansed and refreshed from the waters of Distillation. (Rosarium Philosophorum, Frankfurt 1550)

In alchemical lore, the process of Distillation was invented by Maria Prophetissa, the Jewish alchemist and female counterpart of Hermes. She is said to have invented and tested scores of Distillation vessels, including the Pelican retort. An enigmatic saying of Maria Prophetissa known as “Maria’s Cry” is said to summarize the universal Distillation in terms of the number of its components: “One becomes Two; Two becomes Three; and out of the third comes the One as the Fourth.”² According to Cabalistic alchemists, such as the noted Elizabethan metaphysician Thomas Thymme, Maria’s Cry is a numerological summary of the Emerald Tablet, which we know she was very

fond of paraphrasing (see page 194). According to this scheme, the Introductory Rubric presents the initial unity from which the universe is split in two, creating the One Mind and the One Thing whose realms are the Above and Below described in the Doctrine of Correspondences. The three substances formed in the Above (in heaven) then create the four elements of the Below (on Earth) through the archetypal influences that the tablet attempts to show us how to harness. In essence, this ouroboric process is the “consecration of the whole Universe” described in the tablet. This process is the materialization of the divine, the unity mentioned at the beginning and end of Maria’s Cry.

Images of Distillation include baptismal fonts, the lotus flower, the Edelweiss flower and other eightfold patterns, as well as rose petals, rain, snow, and rainbows. Animal images include the unicorn, white doves, soaring birds, owls, pelicans, a serpent on the cross, winged serpents, and the Green Lion eating the Sun. Sometimes, this crucial step is represented by flames ascending into the sky or a dragon in flames with its tail in its mouth. One of the tarot cards showing Distillation is the counterpart of the Hierophant—the High Priestess. She represents the esoteric soul of the alchemist, his intuition and the Mercury of his being. The Pope card represents the higher masculine energies of Sulfur that provide healing energy at this stage. The Temperance card symbolizes the patience required by the alchemist for the repeated Distillations to work their magic, while the Tower or Athanor is our body, where the higher Distillation takes place. Dream images of Distillation include flying, climbing to the tops of mountains, riding in elevators or on escalators, walking the streets of deserted cities, confronting mountain lions or eagles, and releasing caged birds.

So, like all the operations in alchemy, Distillation takes place on three levels simultaneously: the physical, the mental, and the spiritual. In fact, the Emerald Tablet suggests that the whole universe is undergoing Distillation, a gradual purification in which repeated ascending and descending currents drive the spiritization of matter itself. This reality was verified firsthand in the revelations of Hermes and others who have experienced the vertical axis of reality.

My Distillation: Swimming in the Ouroboric River

In March 1990, an anthropologist friend from California State University invited me to accompany him on a trip to Mexico, where he had discovered a group of Huichol Indians who were willing to share a mystical brew that reportedly invoked a view of “the Above and Below” much like that described by Hermes in his revelation. Their blend of mushrooms and local herbs allowed one to pass through what they called the *nierika*, a barrier between ordinary and nonordinary realities. Their concoction supposedly divided the consciousness of the experiencer so that it was possible to carry on a conversation with an outsider while under the influence of the plant “ally.” Though a firm believer that enlightenment can be achieved through the brain’s own chemicals, I found my friend’s description of the Hermetic components of the experience intriguing and I agreed to try it. After we arrived in Chihuahua, we set up a meeting with the shaman for late the following night. The spot chosen was off a dirt road in the Sierra del Nido north of town. There, in the middle of an open field, we built a blazing fire and sat around it as the shaman brewed his *nierika*-breaking tea. It was agreed that I would try the mixture first, while my friend recorded my responses to his questions. However, the beginning of my experience was anything but pleasurable, as can be seen from the following transcript of the tape recording we made that night:

It’s been thirty minutes. What are you experiencing?

I feel ill and numb. Everything’s gray and lifeless. I’m starting to think I’ve been poisoned. Should I try to throw up?

It’s already in your system. Just wait this out. It will pass soon.

There’s a really terrible sense of foreboding, like something is coming for me. I’m actually trembling. These aren’t chills but tremors deep in the body that spread from neck to foot. I wasn’t expecting them. Does this happen to everyone?

Some people at first. I don’t know if it’s physiological or psychological, but it won’t last.

These body spasms are interesting. They are not like the jiggly back-and-forth movement of chills but rolling movements underneath your skin. Deep, rolling movements.

It's sixty minutes. How are you doing?

The tremors are coming in big waves now. One wave is over and another is just beginning. I realize for certain that something inside me, some fundamental ugly thing, is resisting this experience with all its might. The tremors come from that battle. Now that they are coming in slow waves, it must mean the Resister inside is weakening. But the presence that overpowered me: I do not know what it was. Not Death, but close. It's a wave of consciousness that just brushes everything else aside.

You've been under for two hours now. What are you feeling?

This Presence came to me in waves and then knocked me out of the picture. Now I can see my rational self from another part of me, and what I see is very ugly-seeming. Disgusting almost. Not that I am searching for some revelatory thing here, but I saw myself. This Presence I was afraid of is more connected to the world than any of us. Its waves are washing up images into my visual field from inside my brain and my whole body too. These are very visceral, very sensuous images and my rational part does not understand this new pressure between body and mind. But I am no longer that frightened rational part, so it doesn't bother me.

It's two-and-a-half hours now. You lost consciousness for ten minutes or so. Are you OK?

I'm tripping now! Really tripping. I didn't know you actually went on a *trip*. My head is plastered to the ground, and I can't raise it, and if I open my eyes, they flinch at the brilliant lights racing toward me. I'm going somewhere but talking with you keeps me connected. I'm very detached, and this is a wonderful part of it as opposed to the earlier frightening waves of assault. My imagination, or whatever this is, is extremely fertile, like I've been fertilized by something. There is another light in here besides mine, and it's like the sun, like a golden sword hanging over me with its rays all coming down. I now realize that this Sun is *always* up there.

What else do you see? What's it like?

I've totally lost track of time. I lost track of that, and I lost track of ego, and I lost track of my outward-appearing body. I mean, I'm aware of the fact that my nose is running like crazy and stuff like that, but I am more aware of certain other things. Like inside of my body there is a whole tapestry unfolding from these waves of light that started as tremors. Remember? There were tremors because I was fighting to control or keep the waves back.

This is a very nice somatic experience because you're really into your body—not *your* body—this isn't *my* body anymore. Inside me, there is a *totally different world*, and it's inside me and outside me both at the same time. You see, I *know* it's beyond my own imagination 'cause I can't imagine things like this. I have a good imagination but this is ridiculous. These things get their life from something else. I don't know how to describe it. For starts, these colors have *texture*—velvet, black velvet colors.

It all just keeps going on no matter what you do?

It just goes on by itself, and I'm being let in on it. There is an undulating rhythm here too, but it is not horizontal like before. It's circulating up and down, and I'm caught up in it. I keep going back up into the light and back down into the darkness. There is a top and bottom to this.

What do you see if you look around?

There are these beastly images down below that really don't bother me at all. It's the ones above that affect me. I can feel myself searching for a word to describe these beautiful images above, and as soon as I conceptualize the word—I was going to say “geometric”—it got heavy and fell, you know? These are not geometric images; these are “*deometric*.”

What's the point in those beastly things if they don't affect you? Are they demons because they block you going above?

OK, I'll go down there. By the way, I'm not the one doing this. It's like catching an elevator or something. So I'm going to catch this current down. OK. See, we're going down into the other part. It's like this is a more material part and above is a more ethereal part. But I've been around in here a few times, and there is no difference between these two. They flow together. And your question was what these demons are about. These demons are all about us, you know, that ugly part that got blown away in me. It's just light and darkness, two sides to the same coin. I am not afraid because I saw how they flow into each other. That is where our problem is—that we see a difference—because somehow in our minds we automatically attach “good” or “bad” to everything. Don't get caught up in the illusion that something above is good or something below is bad. That's not right. No, that's way off.

But what about the actual things you're seeing down there?

Anyway, these images: it's like the images below have to do with us somehow, but with silly things, and I don't know where they are all coming from. They are part of the thousand million things. They're part of that: every

single atom, every single individual, every single society. They are part of the myriad of things which are temporary crystallizations of this light above. Let me grab one of my images down here. I see immediately many eyes, but they're not threatening eyes. They're like the fake eyes on peacock feathers, threatening but illusory. But they're composed, like everything here, of this crazy spectrum or rainbow of colors—there's no filling in with just one color. With this image, my particular somatic experience—meaning it goes right into your body—was when my father tried to scare me when I was a kid. I can go down into my body and see just where this entered into me. We had an old washroom in the basement, and I had to go down to pee after watching a movie that featured the “Evil Eye.” My father turned off all the lights in the basement, then stuck his wide-open eye, illuminated by a flashlight, into a big hole in the wall. I started screaming and couldn't stop. It wasn't cruel; he was moving on an impulse to have some fun. But that was not how my body took it, and it went right to my core. And that core of my being flows and changes just like that thing flowing inside/outside my head right now.

So you can move around anywhere you want?

Oh, yeah. I can go into a nerve in my ear and actually hear myself talking. I should say “feel” myself talking. I just entered the outside of my body for a second. The outside was very cold; it's very warm inside and I definitely want to stay in here. I'm also a little intimidated: it's so colorless and cold out there, and I don't know how to stay connected to my body unless I'm in it. I *do* know for sure that movement follows thought in here. Not in the sense that you think you are going to walk, and your leg moves. No sir. That's so absolutely primitive; it takes ages. Here, you just think and *wham*—it's over, you're already there. My mind right now is encapsulated, and there is nothing to slow me down. I love these questions.

You love these questions?

Questions are super important in here. I am amazed how questions can tag you—like kids playing tag I mean. Inside here things are so fluid, it's important to stay encapsulated. Like my mind right now is encapsulated; it's just a fundamental thing happening to me. But a question is a point of organizing the energy around, so it's nice to have a question. But it's amazing how you can separate yourself and talk about it with someone outside. The encapsulated mind—the only terminology I can come up with for my personal experience now—likes to ask only one question over and over,

which is: Where is the center of things? I am keeping very centered here, and yet all this stuff is going on.

So what is up at the other end?

Wow, it's obviously beyond words. Something very real. Mind, and not mine, is in control in here, and it is simply beyond words. I comprehend but don't know how to tell you. That it's not bad; it is really very refreshing to have finally transcended words and directly know something. I can reach into any part of this Mind, because it is all flowing into itself. Now, I am already at the top, and there is not a myriad of things like below. The one main thing here is this river. I really enjoy seeing this river. I could stay on the bank of this river forever. If it wasn't for these crystallizing thoughts and how I follow them, I would. This river has every color ever imagined and then some. It is a living rainbow of fluid colors that keeps flowing up, back, then around and into itself like a figure-eight. This place is full of spectacular images, but nothing rivals this river. Imagine flowing, brilliant colors vibrating like electrical wires or something. And I get the impression, because of the way the river is set off and always flowing, that it is also like a *big* crystallized thought itself. To the left of the river at this level, I somehow *know* those things over there are giant crystallized thoughts. They are tall spires of shining crystal, basically clear but with an iridescent sheen. They are off by themselves, and I do not know how to get over there. This level has a slight horizontal component, and I have not yet learned to travel horizontally, only vertically. They seem like stars or spires. I cannot see all of them, but there doesn't seem to be more than a dozen or so. And that is all there is. I have the distinct feeling that there is even brighter light above, but it is not flowing like things here.

That river sounds like a small copy of the whole experience you are in.

No! This river is a copy of nothing; everything is a copy of it. It's the ruler of the whole universe we are both in, inside here and outside there. This river flows downward and becomes the outside, which then flows upward to become the inside. Somewhere there is a connection—I do not want to trace it—between this river and the whole universe unfolding. Down there really deep is where the darkness turns into this rainbow thing again. So even matter flows back into itself. Everything here is about this river flowing and the stuff that accumulates on its banks. Everything else is irrelevant to that. Right at the edge of the river is really sacred ground.

How do you know all this?

It's just self-evident when you are here. Everything just flows together in here and there is no hiding anything. You can actually see how the negative flows into the positive down below and turns into these solid images, and I can see it happening. You can't say that matter or the body is evil because it all eventually flows into the light and you can see its inherent innocence. We talk about devils, angels, and gods on the outside, and they're all our images with their own kind of reality, but you put them next to this stuff in here, and wow! You just know that this is where it is at as far as thoughts and feelings are concerned.

Is there anyone else in there with you?

I am my mind in this protected ball that is like my star, you know, and I can see other stars. It is not the multifarious myriad like it is on the outside, and it seems to me that there are only a few of these stars. Yet I can't share these stars now, because I can't move horizontally. I sense something still larger than this place, and maybe there I can share other stars. You would think I would be afraid of being in here alone, but that is ego again. You are never alone in here: you have this golden light and these images that are very truthful. So, I am in here with my star, and occasionally I am fighting off the body to stay here. And it's all wonderful.

Why are you fighting off your body?

It wants me back. Sometimes I can feel distant waves of nausea rising from it, but even that feels good. I can feel every fiber of my physical body in slow, painless motion and anything, including being burned alive with my sinews and nerves on fire, would feel good. But I know if I seek sensation I will go below. It is these thoughtforms that my star follows that take me places. There is just this big process going on in here, and none of it is bad or good. It's like a giant factory where only the output counts.

You're probably the first person ever to describe heaven as a factory! I'm really amazed at how you can stay so lucid. Just tell me what you're thinking.

Everything just is, you simply are this way. The only place there are dirty traits is on the outside. You can see the gray dirt out there. This dirt has its own patterns that are not good for us, because good and bad apply out there. It is not good for *our* lives, *our* technology, this pattern. It's not bad from in here, though, but if you follow this down, it's a tragic thing, I guess. I'm forcing myself down, and I am trying really hard to bring this back. It is no

longer pure thoughtforms down here; it is where the thoughtforms have feeling. (Oops! I shouldn't have gone back down here. Here comes those waves of nausea that feel so good. If I ever have an orgasmic puke, it'll be in here. I could barf in ecstasy because I could feel every fiber of my being participate . . . I could come out now, but I don't want to.) It's tragic but not bad down here; these are individuals, the myriad of manifested things.

What is so tragic there?

It is tragic because people are only connected to this part of the process and are not free to travel vertically. They can travel only horizontally down here. I can also see these noncrystalline structures down here, genetics and other garbage—not garbage—but not as beautiful as the other stuff. My trait in here is awareness, and I am aware of the dark heaviness in people and in my outside self. It's all heavy and dark but it goes through this unspeakable process in that river and it all changes. The people who die and don't understand: I feel a wave of great sympathy for them and cherish them. I am in here in this eternal moment watching this great tragedy in people. I can see how different we all are and how wonderful that is because from here there are no judgments, and without judgments you can appreciate all twelve or godzillion of them. What I mean is our differences drive this process, and only lying, shame, and fear stop it. Of course, our species problems are irrelevant because if we don't succeed, something else will. But still, I feel this sense of tragedy down here, and it has to do with the sacrifice we have to make.

What sacrifice?

Our life force. If we don't know how to use it, it will be dissipated in the river and used by something else. Those finite number of stars on top are our fundamental identities which go on and on. Then you go down and it gets really broken up, broken up into all these myriad of things and people. Yet they are all one, even all the stars that go right back to that greater Mind I could only sense up there. The tragedy is that these people are wonderful, and it is only our societal-suicidal institutions that have failed them.

It's been over four hours. How are you feeling?

I can sense the thought before the words now, and I am coming down into the body right on the edge. Before long, I won't be able to follow my thoughts upwards, but I won't forget what I have seen firsthand. I'm really starting to feel the heaviness here in my body. I can feel the play of all the

myriad of cells vibrating at different frequencies, but still within the spectrum of the river. These bodily frequencies are real slow. I don't mean to technically qualify this, but if you follow these frequencies down into matter, they stop, and then they change, and it is this river flowing back into itself. So I can follow it around, and after it stops, I can feel these sharp rainbows. Then these vibrations get faster and this river is quickening the zero vibrations that come around. But that was the last time around for me. When I think now, I don't move, and alarms are sounding in my brain. The ego is recovering and knows I was gone.

Working with the Higher Elements in Distillation

My Distillation experience fundamentally changed me. It left tracks I could follow back to the place it took me, and I have tried to explore that place without the help of a plant “ally” in deeply imaginative meditation. I miss the fluidity of the ally, and it takes much longer to make progress, but it is easier to chart the new ground so others will understand how to get there. Of this I am certain: There is a huge new frontier awaiting our exploration, and it is not the macrocosm of the universe but the microcosm of the mind. According to Hermes, they are one and the same, and I am certainly not the first to verify this. Whether the figure-eight Möbius River I saw is called the Tunnel of Light, the Fountain of Fountains, the Cornucopia or Plentitude of God, it is all the same One Thing that is the subject of the Emerald Tablet.



Maria Prophetissa instructs us to merge the waters of the Above and Below in Distillation. (Michael Maier, Symbola Aureae, Frankfort 1617)

“The eyes of my soul were opened,” reported the thirteenth-century Franciscan nun Angelo of Foligno, “and I beheld the Plenitude of God, whereby I did comprehend the whole world, both here and beyond the [great] sea, and the abyss and all things else; and therein I beheld naught save the divine Power in a manner assuredly indescribable, so that through excess of marveling the soul cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘This world is full of God!’ ”

“There is above the Celestial Fire an incorruptible Flame, always sparkling: the Spring of Life, the Fountain of All Being, the Original of all things,” said the sixth-century Persian prophet Zoroaster, in the *Avesta*. “This Flame produces all things, and nothing perishes but what it consumes. It makes itself known by itself. The primary, self-perfected Fountain of Fire

poured forth the primogenial ideas. These multitudes of patterns ascend flashingly into the shining worlds, and in all of them are contained the Three Supernals.”

Those Three Supernals form the thrice-greatest crown of Hermes and can always be found operating in these kinds of experiences. For the alchemists, they were heavenly substances of Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt. As we have seen, Sulfur came to symbolize the masculine forces of passionate willpower, while Mercury was associated with feminine attributes of thought and imagination. On the higher levels of the Work, these substances work together to create the coagulated Salt which is the Philosopher’s Stone. During Distillation, Sulfur is the fiery power of desire and will that guide the mind into the higher realms, and Mercury is the watery essence of imagination that merges with the powers of the Above.

Modern psychologists have associated the Mercury at work in Dissolution with the powers of the personal unconscious, which act like water to settle us and bring us back to earth. During Distillation, however, Mercury is associated with the powers of the collective unconscious which act like steam to raise us up. These two types of Mercurial Water work together in a process the alchemists named “cohobation,” which is an operation in which the matter is frequently soaked in liquid and the moisture subsequently removed by Distillation.

That is exactly what we try to accomplish during the Cohobation Meditation. Relaxing in a comfortable seated position, the adept tries to feel the rising and falling currents of the Mercury within. Here’s the process: Start with some strong issue that has been bothering you lately. Try to generate as much emotional energy as you can. Bring your emotions to a boil and do not hesitate to get angry, sad, or frustrated. Try to feel how the emotions pull you down into your body and darkness. Now, using your impartial mind, distill only the facts from the situation. Try to be objective and see who was really at fault or whether it was all just an accident. Imagine the situation developing in a different way and what you could have done to change the outcome. Try to feel how distilling your experience raises you out of your body and into light. If accomplished, the Distillation of emotional energy can create a highly purified spiritual force.

The other type of Distillation, usually performed on solidified substances, is sublimation. According to the Greek mathematician and alchemist

Eudoxus (400-350 B.C.E.): “He who knows how to sublime the Stone philosophically, justly deserves the name of a philosopher, since he knows the Fire of the Wise, which is the only instrument which can work this sublimation.” The Fire of the Wise is a state of consciousness characterized by the unyielding thought and willpower represented by Sulfur.³

In Sublimation Meditation, we attempt to raise and transmute our basest instincts and most stubborn beliefs. Alchemical sublimation is freeing the energy of passion for transformation, expressing it, and then spiritizing it. In meditation, we heat these most solidified essences of soul and body through the fire of Sulfuric consciousness. As the dark passionate matter raises to seek expression, we immediately “cool” it by objective consciousness and redirect it into spiritual purposes. By reconnecting the base energy to higher archetypal images, we effectively transmute the substance. The result of sublimation is a reincarnated, living, and purified matter that eventually can be coagulated into the all-powerful Stone. For example, the great poet Dante Alighieri was able to sublimate his overwhelming desire for a woman (Beatrice Portinari), whom he first met when she was only nine years old, into an idealized image of her that provided a lifetime of creative force and spiritual insight in his writing. In his monumental *Divine Comedy*, he expresses his exalted love for her and the importance it had throughout his life. In the three-part work, he first meets Beatrice in the *Inferno*, where she saves him from eternal damnation. Then she disappears, and he searches relentlessly until he finds her in *Purgatorio*. Finally, she appears again to guide him through *Paradiso*, where his spiritized love ends with his total assimilation into the divine presence. Beatrice for Dante was the alchemical sublimate, rising from her materialization in hell and vaporization during purgatory to her ultimate rematerialization and union in the Above.

Circulating the Light

The circulation of mind and light in the Fountain of Fountains is mirrored in the Below in the human body. Chinese alchemists became proficient at this type of Distillation thousands of years ago. Called the “Circulation of the

Light,” the aspirant is taught to “concentrate on the light of the inmost region and, while doing so, to free himself from all outer and inner entanglements.” The first stage of the Distillation is the Mercury or watery phase in which the light is gathered by quieting the body and mind through breath awareness and meditation. The light of the True Imagination is a kind of seed energy scattered throughout the body, and the object is to bring it all together in a stove or athanor visualized in the abdominal cavity just below the navel.

In the second phase of the Circulation of the Light, sulfuric or firey consciousness is used to initiate the movement of the accumulated light energy. With concentration fixed at the level of the abdominal athanor, the practitioner wills and feels the light to circulate up the “channel of function” through the chest cavity to the “precious cauldron” at the center of the brain. There, the light energy is distilled and accumulated, and any unconverted energy returns to the navel area via the “channel of control” that runs down the back. The adept repeats the Circulation of the Light daily for months or even years, until enough of the “light” collects to crystallize in the cauldron within the brain. According to Chinese alchemists, the subtle matter distilled through this process congeals into a Golden Pill, which is the adept’s passage to perfect health and immortality.

The development of the relaxed-yet-alert state of concentration required by such meditations is at the heart of the psychological Distillation process, which is basically a turning inward to raise consciousness. There are also moving meditations designed to accomplish the same thing. The slow and graceful movements of the ancient art of Tai Chi Chuan are designed to make the practitioner aware of the subtle light energy (the *chi*) as it circulates in the body. The sadhana postures of Kundalini yoga actually attempt to bind one’s awareness to this energy so it can be followed upward as it is distilled from the body in a union of the individual’s consciousness with the infinite consciousness of God. These exercises work with the vertical axis in the human body and are explained in detail in chapter 19 (“Message of the Caduceus”).

The Distilled Person

By cleansing ourselves of our instincts and purifying our emotions during Distillation, we gain a higher perspective from which to continue the Work to its final stage. The purest experience of emotional energy (such as love) is sometimes found where it is least expected—in unattachment. This separation or distancing from the object of desire allows an entirely new perspective. In alchemical terms, it represents sublimation, the resurrection of the most basic and darkest matter on a higher level. Chemically, this powder will become the Stone for which we are searching.

The undistilled person is subject to emotional extremes and can appear quite immoral to others, since he or she is ruled by the forces of lust, survival, and greed. Once distilled, however, a person gains astonishing equanimity and one-pointedness. Though sometimes distilled people appear lacking in basic feelings and emotions, they can be highly intuitive and undeniably psychic when they take the larger view to which they are privy. Examples of a few icons of Distillation include J. Robert Oppenheimer and Albert Einstein, as well as the fictional alien emissary Klaatu, played by Michael Rennie, in the archetypal film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951).

The alchemists considered the astrological characteristics of Distillation to be primarily those of Virgo, whose cipher was assigned to represent that operation. The Egyptians associated their mother goddess Isis with this sign, and her theme of changing from a child-like state to a wiser, individualized state was represented by the ripening of crops. The quest of Virgo persons is for meaningful service, and they are therefore closely allied with Hermes. Those born under this Earth sign like things in order, sometimes worry too much, and have a tendency toward licentiousness, but conscientiousness is their redeeming trait and they have an amazingly unselfish sense of service to others. They also tend to be precise and analytical, seeking to know and understand everything. Famous people born under the contradictory sign of the Virgin include Mother Teresa, Oliver Stone, Dr. Joyce Brothers, Lily Tomlin, Keanu Reeves, Michael Jackson, and the character of Pee-wee Herman.

Libra is the astrological sign the alchemists chose to denote the process of sublimation. The ancient Egyptians associated this Air sign with Chonsu, the Divine Child, as well as Maat, the goddess of Truth so revered by Akhenaten. The search of the Libra person is for a true soulmate. Librans tend to be artistically sensitive, sociable, balanced, charming, and sympathetic to others.

While prizing beauty and harmony, they can sometimes be temperamental or indecisive, which makes people doubt their judgment. Famous people born under the sign of the Scales are T. S. Eliot, e. e. cummings, Truman Capote, John Lennon, Jimmy Carter, Mahatma Gandhi, Jesse Jackson, Johnny Carson, and Barbara Walters.

Once one has achieved Distillation and sublimated the Ferment, the final step in alchemical transformation is Coagulation. This is the solidification of the syrupy liquid or powdery essence that remains after Distillation into a permanent and hardened Stone, which is the subject of the next chapter.

[1](#) From Adolphe Franck, *Kabbalah: The Religious Philosophy of the Hebrews* (Secaucus, New Jersey: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1979).

[2](#) From Mark Haeffner, *Dictionary of Alchemy* (San Francisco, California: HarperCollins Aquarian, 1994).

[3](#) From *Oktaeteris* by Eudoxus of Cnidus. Written around 370 B.C.E., the book proposes an eight-year cycle in the cosmos. At the time, Eudoxus was being initiated into the Hermetic mysteries. He is mostly remembered for his contributions to mathematics, including the theory of proportion and method of exhaustion which anticipated much of modern calculus.



Chapter 17

COAGULATION: *ULTIMA MATERIA* OF THE SOUL

The Phoenix Rises from the Ashes

The last operation of alchemy is Coagulation, in which the seven-stepped Emerald Formula of *Solve et Coagula* (Dissolve and Coagulate) is satisfied. The body is made spiritual and the spirit is made corporeal. Coagulation transcends both heaven and earth and produces a new incarnation that can survive in both realms. According to contemporary French alchemist François Trojani, the Emerald Formula is at work on all levels in the universe, even in the basic differences between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres on our own planet. He explained his views in a recent interview:

Solve et Coagula: dissolution and condensation, emptiness and form, unmanifest and manifest, implicate and explicate. This is perhaps the most powerful dialectic of all. The typical occidental onesidedness tends to be on the *Coagula* side of the equation, and the typical oriental onesidedness tends to be on the *Solve* side. [The West] needs a huge dose of *Solve*, but—and this especially needs to be heard by those of the Eastern persuasion—the Self also coagulates. It produces questions that cannot be “solved,” such as the question of questions: “Who am I?” The infinite value of this question is in the ever-deepening asking of it, *not* in the “solving” of it. In this question, we reach the heart of alchemical philosophy, the secret which protects itself: the simultaneity, the identity of *Solve et Coagula*. In other words, only by totally embracing my mortality, my utter Dissolution, can I attain immortality. The Coagulation, the deep and relentless asking of the question “Who am I?” is not other than the solution of the question. The coagulated Salt is not other than the dissolved Salt. In a sense, evolution *is* the dynamic, intelligent harmony of *Solve et Coagula*. An ancient alchemical expression of the paradox is: from the One, towards the One, by means of the One.”¹

That paradoxical expression contains the basic message of the Emerald Tablet. There is only One from which all things proceed and into which all things recede. Call it the One Thing, the Möbius River, the Fountain of Fountains, God, or whatever you want, knowledge of this process is the Philosopher's Stone. "In alchemical language," said Trojani, "it is facing up to the darkness of matter, the darkness of death, and beyond that to the 'darkness which is darker than dark,' which is none other than my truest Self, or Source. Which could just as well be described as boundless and infinite Light." So, the difference between the lowest state of consciousness in alchemy and the highest is like the difference between soft, black coal and a hard, clear diamond. They seem totally different, yet they are both made out of the same material—carbon.

In alchemical drawings, this quixotic situation is illustrated by an androgynous youth emerging from a grave, a king reclaiming his throne, or a purple moon fallen to the earth with a single red bird ascending into the sky. The tarot cards symbolizing Coagulation are also paradoxical: the Devil and the Magician/Hierophant, who is making his second appearance as Hermes (earlier during Fermentation and now in Coagulation). Together the Hierophant and the Devil stand for the opposing forces of light and darkness that come together in the higher marriage, the Marriage of Heaven and Hell, which produces the divine Androgyne, or the Stone. The Androgyne, often showing as a boy Mercury, symbolizes the joining of opposites on all levels necessary at this stage. Another tarot card of Coagulation is the Sun, which symbolizes the projection and multiplication powers of the Stone. The Judgment card depicts this final achievement, even as the World card shows our return to earth to embody these higher insights in the eighth stage—the next step after Coagulation, when we return to where we started. Other alchemical images include a soaring eagle, the winged Mercury, the balanced scales of justice, or wingless creatures borne away by winged creatures.



Seven steps lead to the coagulated King, who has conquered his own imperfections and united the Above with the Below. (Musaeum Hermeticum, Frankfurt 1625)

For most alchemists, however, the primary symbol of Coagulation was the Phoenix, a mythical bird that built its nest in a fire and then rose from the flames renewed. Both the Phoenix and the Emerald Tablet were thought to have originated in the ancient land of Phoenicia. It is suspected that the original language of the Emerald Tablet was an ancient Phoenician dialect,

and the legend of the Phoenix probably goes back at least that far. The Egyptians may have even called the Emerald Tablet the Phoenix. “I am the Great Phoenix,” reads an ancient Egyptian stela, “which is in Heliopolis. I am the Ordering [rendering] of all that is and exists.”

The Phoenix was said to have originated in Phoenicia in the Arabian lands but ended up in Egypt, the land of alchemy. It is known that the Egyptians associated the Phoenix with their own “Bennu Bird,” a symbol of the completely spiritized self which rises from the lower nature of the soul in a recapitulation of the seven stages of alchemy. In a like manner, the Phoenix bird rose from the fires of its self-immolation to become the Morning Star, and today it is considered an archetypal symbol of the Sun and gold. Among later alchemists the Phoenix was sometimes called the “Ortus,” the rectified, four-legged bird. It had “black eyes, a white face, white forepaws, black hind paws, and a red head with streaks of gold reaching to its neck.”

Psychologically, the Phoenix is the resurrected personality seen as a successful individuation resulting in peace of mind, heightened energy, and a free-flowing adaptability to new situations. The alchemist remembers the inspired states of Fermentation and Distillation and has made them a permanent part of his personality. He deliberately slows down his pace of life to allow feelings and intuition to surface. In this way, he stays connected to a newly discovered Presence within.

In the words of Dr. Annie Besant, the British theosophist, this is “a Presence which in our quietest, our noblest, our purest moments, is more perceptible than in the rush and turmoil of the world; something so great that it enfolds our whole nature; something so profound that we know that nothing in our own nature is alien from it.”² In his state of clarity, the alchemist knows exactly who he is, what he believes, and what is going on within him at any given moment. The newly discovered presence within becomes a permanent Stone, which he can rely on and touch any time he pleases.

My Coagulation: Hanging from a Kite String

In many ways, the book that lies before you is part of my own Coagulation. Having clearly experienced the Pattern of the tablet in my own life, I became even more determined to let people know how amazingly accurate is the description of the universe given to us by Hermes. I also began to appreciate the heroic nature of men like Akhenaten and Balinas, who also asked fundamental questions of the tablet and then tried with all their might to live by the answers it gave them. I developed an appreciation of their tremendous personal courage and their unwavering spirit of service to a higher cause. I realized that their majesty came from strength they had coagulated within themselves, which represented the best of the human spirit, the true Stone of the Philosophers.

Still, I wanted to bring this Stone to life in me. Convinced more than ever that there existed a separate reality which participates in our world in ways we cannot fathom from the perspective of everyday consciousness, I started devoting even more time to my inner Work. I wanted to find a way through which anyone could “verify” its existence. I was able to return to this vertical axis of reality by applying the Seven Steps of Transformation revealed in the Emerald Tablet. This “Grand Meditation” (discussed later in this chapter) provides a blueprint for escaping the mundane world, and on those days when everything came together, I was able to perfect my “athletic” abilities in this new realm and travel about more easily. My immediate goal was to project the core of my being—my encapsulated consciousness—outside the confines of my own body. This was much more difficult than it had seemed during Distillation. The problem was that whenever I felt I was outside my body in meditation, the slight contamination I carried with me from my ego consciousness immediately panicked and pulled me back inside. I spent many years deliberately trying to eliminate this knee-jerk ego reaction before succeeding quite by accident.

In October 1991, I had a free day at home alone and decided to devote my time to practicing the Grand Meditation. As evening approached, I was still sitting in a lounge chair in my living room, trying to project my encapsulated consciousness across the room into the “freedom” of the kitchen. The intense mental effort had really exhausted me, and I gradually slumped into a stupor in which I stayed semiconscious while my body slept. At first I thought I had succeeded, because it felt like I was in the encapsulated state. I thought of the area in the kitchen to which I wanted to project, but nothing happened. I

could not make myself follow my thoughts like I had in Distillation. Instead, I was caught in a kind of lonely purgatory consisting of just me and my thoughts going nowhere.

In this state of reverie, it somehow dawned on me that it had gotten dark outside and I had not bothered to lock the doors to the house. My worst fears were confirmed when I heard a noise like someone stumbling around in the entryway. Thinking an intruder had gotten in, I rushed to wake myself but found that I was paralyzed, that I could not move any part of my body no matter how hard I tried. Finally, in utter panic, I was able to leap up from my chair, slide in behind the kitchen door, and peak through the crack along the hinges to see who was there. In the dim light, all I could see was a cardboard box laying on the floor. Somebody was in the house! The next thing I remember was someone shining a flashlight on me from behind.

I whipped around to see who it was, but the light was not from a flashlight. To my amazement, a golden tube of light stretched from my midsection, hugged the floor, traveled up the side of my chair, and terminated in the forehead of my lifeless body. This living lightbeam, which appeared to be affected by the forces of gravity, kept circulating and moving within itself and actually illuminated the whole room. There was no doubt in my mind that this was a real thing happening in real time. But as soon as I understood that this umbilical of light was nourishing my consciousness, that I was truly outside my body, I felt myself being pulled back into it. I could even hear the sucking sound and feel myself slam back into my body with a jolt that awoke me. After I recovered fully, I discovered that I had indeed left the front door unlocked, and after it got dark, a neighbor brought over a parcel the mailman had misdelivered. Thinking no one was home, she simply placed it inside the front door.

Other experiencers have called what I saw the “astral cord,” though that hardly seems to do it justice. What I saw was an Umbilical to the Other Side, a living thing feeding the energy for me to exist there. That subtle realm exists within physical reality and lies just outside our grasp. It is made up of the light trapped in matter that the alchemists sought to free.

The Projection of the Stone

By seeking access to the subtle realm through the controlled fire of meditation instead of the blazing inferno of the ally experience, I hoped to chart my journey so I could return whenever I wanted. That required fashioning a permanent though spiritual encapsulation of mind. The alchemists called this new body the Stellar or Astral Stone. In their view, the lead of physical existence is transformed into a Golden Body full of vitality and free to manifest itself on many different levels. “The Soul proceeds out of the unified Body,” as one alchemist noted. “She is herself the Living Body.” In terms of spiritual chemistry, the immortal soul has joined with spirit from the Above to form a Living Stone. Just as the four elements come together in the Below to form our physical bodies, so can we fashion a Second Body with the elements from the Above. And that Second Body is free to go in a lot more interesting places than just my kitchen.

Dr. Dell Sokol, the psychologist whose work on transcendental sex we reviewed in chapter 14 (“Conjunction: Creating the Overself ”), gained personal knowledge of the unlimited potential of the Second Body during a prolonged sexual encounter with her husband, though the sex act itself was not the initiator of the experience. “The sexual discipline,” she explained, “gave me the time, space, and incident to become that superb state.” After experiencing manifestations of *kundalini* such as rushes of energy up the spine and visions of light and color, a sense of physical bliss spread out from her genital area throughout her whole body. After that, she seemed to become one with her thoughts, and she felt no separation between herself and anything that arose in consciousness. Where her thoughts went, there she traveled. Finally, after raising her thoughts to the ultimate level, she merged with the cosmic presence of the One Mind. Here is what happened in her own words:

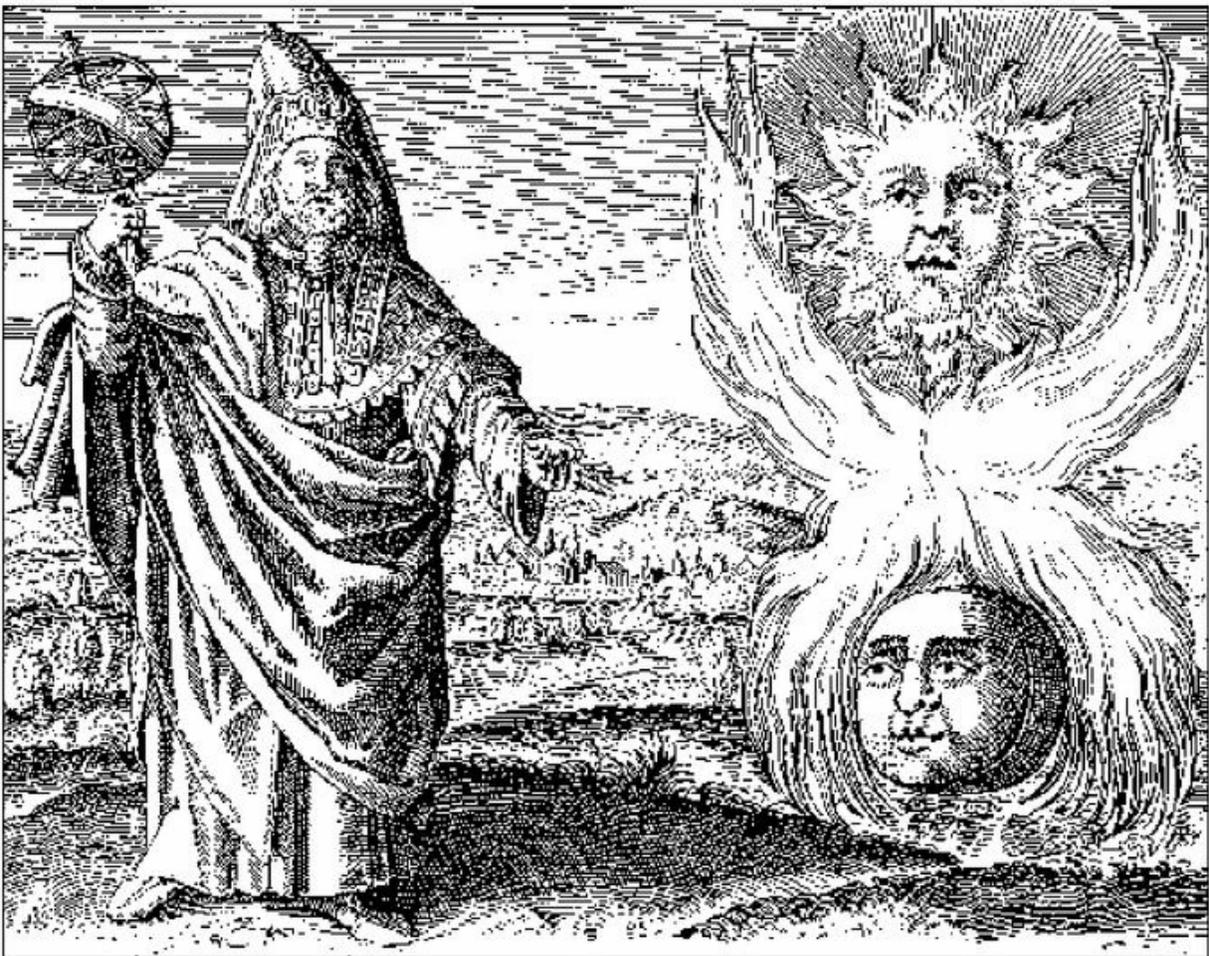
A galaxy of stars spun endlessly through the universe, and I was that. The rapture exceeded any pleasure, joy, ecstasy, or bliss that I had ever experienced or imagined. This was the most prolonged and intense bliss that I have ever known. Individuality dissolved into the primordial infinite joy. There was a complete loss of the condition of the skin-bound body-mind. There was no “I” or “self.” The most significant aspect of the state of unity was this transcending of the self-sense. There was not a “union” of the “I” with lover, or “I” with the galaxy. Rather, there was only undifferentiated unity and consciousness as all that.

My husband was aware that something extraordinary was going on even though I did not speak. After some time, the level of consciousness began to change. Gradually I felt once again my separation. With that separation came profound sadness. I wept. During the experience of nonduality, I had no sense of time. Later, my husband estimated the length of the experience to have been about fifteen minutes. I could remember that I had felt an incredible joyous rapture of undifferentiated unity, of being everything, from the hand of another [person] to a galaxy. The state of nonseparation seemed to be my natural condition. Now I felt only the sadness of the separate self, a seemingly “unnatural” state.

Any language that I may use to describe the experience can only be a faint outline, as opposed to the full depth of what actually happened. To me it was a demonstration of possibility, a confirmation that the state of nonduality or undifferentiated unity may be realized through this body-mind. I was graced with a glimpse of that possibility. Anyone who is seriously involved in spiritual practice is also from time to time involved in doubt. I had an intellectual “belief” in nonduality. I believed not in one God but that there is only God. What was an intellectual belief is now whole-body knowing. The experience confirmed to me [that] there is a state of prior happiness, and we are actively preventing it. We egoically add to that perfect condition, and those additions are obstructions that interfere with our innate happiness. That condition is not something to be attained; rather, it is available in any moment when one is able to connect with it by relaxing into it.³

The transcendent body experienced by Dr. Sokol is what Paracelsus referred to as the Iliaster (literally, the “Star in Man”), which he described as the “completely healed human being who has burned away all the dross of his lower being and is free to fly as the Phoenix.” On the personal level, the coagulated body represents the union of our personal self with the collective and cultural Self, the union of the personal and the transpersonal realms. In Christianity, it is expressed as the “seamless garment.” Jesus described it as a condition in which “I and my Father are one” and warned that unless a man is born of both Water and Fire, he cannot enter into this hidden kingdom of God. Many medieval alchemists identified the Stone as Christ himself, and for modern practitioners of all faiths, this Body of Light is the ultimate golden treasure.

But where does this subtle body reside? Its abode is neither the conscious nor the unconscious, which already exist, but an imaginal realm connected to the archetypal dimension in which the individual soul connects to the world soul or vertical axis of reality. This is the middle ground which exists between the stars above and the stars within. By differentiating this middle ground, by creating this imaginal dimension in which to survive, one connects with nature and the cosmos, both the Below and the Above. Or as one Renaissance alchemist put it: “You break through space, fly to heaven in broad daylight, and shed the flesh-and-bone bag, which is now as useless as the alchemical workshop and vessels once the Elixir has been perfected.”



Hermes instructs us to fuse the powers of the Above and the Below in Coagulation. (Michael Maier, Symbola Aureae, Frankfurt 1617)

Working with the Higher Elements in Coagulation

Psychologically, the creation of a permanent state of higher consciousness is what the alchemists meant by the Philosopher's Stone. The paradoxical union of Fire and Water to create the Stone is the idealized state of consciousness that combines thought with feeling. The meditating Buddha is often shown holding a vessel of Coagulation in which he collects the distilled energy of his visions, and the great Persian mystic Zoroaster advises: "If your meditation prolongs itself, you can unite all these Symbols." Primary among these highly charged symbols in alchemy are Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt. As we have learned, the easily ignited, masculine Sulfur stands for our willpower and driving passions, while the amorphous, feminine Mercury represents our ever-changing thoughts and imagination. Neutral Salt is their permanent union, the feeling intellect or perfect intuition incorporated into a body. These are the ultimate elements described in the tablet, and in a Rosicrucian work known as "The Emerald Tablet of the Secret Symbols" (*Geheime Figuren*, Frankfurt, 1785), they are spelt out quite clearly:

The Salt has been one Body that is the very last one in the Art. The Sulfur henceforth is the Soul, without which the Body can do nothing. Mercury is the Spirit of power, holding together both Body and Soul; therefore it is called a medium, since whatever is made without it has no stability. For Soul and Body could not die should Spirit also be with them. And Soul and Spirit could not be, unless they had a Body to dwell in. And no power would have Body or Spirit, if the Soul did not accompany them. This is the meaning of the Art: the Body gives form and constancy, the Soul colors and tinges it, and the Spirit makes it fluid and penetrates it. And therefore, the Art cannot be in one of these three things alone. Nor can the greatest secret [the Stone] exist alone: it must have Body, Soul, and Spirit.

The actual mechanics of the creation of the Stone were revealed by a nineteenth-century Golden Dawn alchemist:

Both the Imagination [Mercury] and the Will [Sulfur] must be called into action; they are co-equal in the Work. Nay more, the Imagination must precede the Will in order to produce the greatest possible effect. The Will unaided can send forth a current, and that current cannot be wholly inoperative; yet its effect is vague and indefinite, because the Will unaided

sends forth nothing but the current of force. The Imagination unaided can create an image, and this image must have an existence of varying duration; yet it can do nothing of importance, unless vitalized and directed by the Will. When however, the two are conjoined—when the Imagination creates an image and the Will directs and uses that image—marvelous magical effects can be obtained.⁴

The Grand Meditation: How to Dematerialize

What will it take to present ourselves to the Cosmos? That is the question we must ask ourselves before proceeding with the final Coagulation. During this operation, we must endure the same kind of existential torture that God went through to manifest himself from the One Thing, the background reality that is present in both nonexistence and existence, both sleep and waking, both death and life. The creation of the Second Body is almost a corollary to this primary act of creation, since the birth of new consciousness requires embodiment.

Our modern leaders and institutions would have us believe that there is only one standardized consciousness available to us, that there is nothing more than one flat, horizontal view of things. We can look to the left, we can look to the right; but we dare not look up or down. Many of us have the desire and willpower to succeed at Coagulation but are afraid to go against this unwritten code and end up just drifting through life, servants to shortsighted leaders who only want us to continue playing their commercialized and nationalistic games. In the *Corpus Hermeticum (Libellus XI)*, Hermes speaks directly to these lost souls with some astonishing advice:

If then you do not make yourself equal to God, you cannot apprehend God; for like is known by like. Leap clear of all that is corporeal, and make yourself grown to a like expanse with that greatness which is beyond all measure; rise above all time and become eternal; then you will apprehend God. Think that for you too nothing is impossible; deem that you too are immortal, and that you are able to grasp all things in your thought, to know every craft and science; find your home in the haunts of every living creature;

make yourself higher than all heights and lower than all depths; bring together in yourself all opposites of quality, heat and cold, dryness and fluidity; think that you are everywhere at once, on land, at sea, in heaven; think that you are not yet begotten, that you are in the womb, that you are young, that you are old, that you have died, that you are in the world beyond the grave; grasp in your thought all of this at once, all times and places, all substances and qualities and magnitudes together; then you can apprehend God. But if you shut up your soul in your body, and abase yourself, and say “I know nothing, I can do nothing; I am afraid of earth and sea, I cannot mount to heaven; I know not what I was, nor what I shall be,” then what have you to do with God?

Hermes not only scolds us for denying our divinity, but also shows us how to reclaim it. The fundamental process of transformation is revealed to humanity in his Emerald Tablet, and the Grand Meditation is structured around the Emerald Formula of *Solve et Coagula*. As we know, the seven operations in the formula are Calcination, Dissolution, Separation, Conjunction, Fermentation, Distillation, and Coagulation. Ideally, the aspirant should memorize the Emerald Tablet and repeat it during this meditation. Alternatively, the Seven Steps can be followed in the order they are presented in the tablet. During the initial transformation of consciousness, we use the first four steps to disentangle ourselves from the manifest world, and in the second part, we use the next three steps to reassemble the purified essences of our being on a higher level.

To begin the Grand Meditation, take a comfortable position in a quiet place where you will not be bothered by interruptions. Ideally, an enclosed area should be dedicated to this type of spiritual pursuit, such as a meditation room, isolation tank, or in front of an altar. The best time to practice the Grand Meditation is in the morning or after taking a short nap. Remove any jewelry and wear loose clothing. Begin by closing your eyes and breathing in deep, slow breaths. Progressively relax your muscles, starting at the tips of your toes and moving upward until you reach the back of your head. The technique is to relax and observe your current thoughts, emotions, and bodily tensions and notice any involuntary changes in breathing as you examine each area. If you feel tension in your breathing, it is a sign that you need to work on that area or subject until it is resolved. If your mental contents are tied to concerns about work, friends, or family, you have to break free of this

horizontal orientation and align yourself vertically with the reality of the Above and the Below.

This initial realignment requires the use of the methods you have already learned to achieve personal Calcination and Dissolution. You must be free of egocentric striving, petty feelings, and body blockages and get in touch with your truest and deepest essences. This is not the time, however, to dredge up old feelings and ideas. During the Grand Meditation, we are dealing only with the base material of the day and are attempting to transform our current temperament. Using the Fire of your introspective consciousness, try to overcome the established parameters of your psyche and burn away the hold your ego has on you. Similarly, by allowing the Water of your unconscious contents to rise, experience your hidden side and try to understand how it is responsible for much of your behavior.

Do not proceed from Calcination and Dissolution until you really believe you have exposed ego and have gotten beyond its illusions and your body is fully relaxed. Clues that this is happening are a feeling of numbness in the muscles, a blank mind, and a clear visual field. In the next phase, Separation, relax your ego and body to the point where neither are active. Try to keep a gentle awareness of what is going on, while you put your body and brain to sleep. This condition of deep relaxation coupled with awareness is known as the hypnagogic state. It may take some practice to achieve, but it is the gateway to experiencing your true Mind. Continue in this state for awhile and consciously let go of any spurious images or thoughts that arise. Enter an even deeper state of relaxation and try to exist only within your mind. Relax so much that you lose all bodily awareness and all sensory input shuts down. That is why it is so important to be in a quiet, undisturbed place—hermetically sealed, as the alchemists would say.

At this point, you exist in a void where the only source of stimulation is your own thoughts. You are literally existing within the Fire of consciousness and your thoughts have tremendous power here. You can intensify this separated state even further by identifying with the strongest currents or forces in this environment. These purified forces come from your own soul and spirit, and they may appear as energy patterns or alchemical images. The normally opposing forces in your personality can be united easily in this nonrational environment by applying the power of thought. Simply picture it and make it so in a new Conjunction. What you have created is the Child of

the Philosophers and that innocent Child is you. You now have a new identity far removed the person you were when you started this meditation.

Your new identity is a center of consciousness that has been described in many spiritual traditions. The Hindu one-point, or *bindu*, is the center of the cosmic axis and represents the turning point of existence into nonexistence. For the Chinese, the indefinable singularity known as the Tao is the source of all things, while Buddhists seek to follow the Middle Path back to the center of the creator. After Conjunction, you have reached a plateau that the ancients called the Lesser Mysteries and alchemists called the Lesser Stone. In this state of consciousness, you have broken free of personal and social restraints to the expression of your true Self.

Sometimes this highly integrated state seems as if you are fully perfected and capable of doing anything you want, when all you have really done is to center yourself in a detached state of consciousness and acknowledged a subtler presence within. But in some people, the very act of enthroning a new ruler of the psyche, be it ever so temporary, awakes vestiges of ego that try to usurp the throne. The attacks of ego at this dark stage of transition usually take the form of images that disturb the equanimity of the centered Self. But Hermes has a trick up his sleeve: simply let the images die of their own poison. You still have control over thought and imagination in here, so turn the energy of the egoic deceptions against themselves and destroy them, like Buddha did in fending off the illusions of Mara under the Bodhi tree. Nothing can disturb the centered mind.

When the tablet tells us to “Separate the Earth from Fire,” it means to remove all matter, including base emotions and ego, from the Secret Fire of inspired imagination. Having purified and isolated the subtle components of our being, we set up a kind of sympathetic correspondence with the living powers of the Above. In the Grand Meditation, this is experienced as a sense of vibration originating just overhead or a visualization of the higher frequencies of the light spectrum. This is something real, and has been documented in a collaboration between Carl Jung and quantum physicist Wolfgang Pauli. Jung and Pauli concluded that archetypal or divine energy exists as psychoid (mental and physical) factors located in the invisible ultraviolet end of the spectrum in the area of high-energy cosmic rays. The pioneering work of Jung and Pauli lends credence to the idea that alchemical transmutation occurs at the level of the subtle body and causes repercussions

in the physical realm as well.^{4,5}

Try to bring these higher vibrations down into your body during the Fermentation phase of the Grand Meditation. Make them surge throughout your physical frame. Concentrate on entraining yourself to the wave pattern entering your body from the Above. Feel these divine frequencies vibrate in you from head to toe. Now, follow these waves as they travel back up and out of your body; then stay with them as they come back down and reenter you. Keep this circulation going until every fiber of your being is in tune with these vibrations. At this point, you are experiencing true dematerialization in the alchemical sense. During this subtilizing Distillation or purifying phase, your physical body is the Ferment, the spiritized womb from which your Second Body will emerge. As the rising and falling waves of Distillation continue, try to observe how the vibrations disperse in your body and then coalesce to depart from your body.

During Coagulation, you must gain control of this vibrational state and start to crystallize the subtle energy into a Stone—your truly independent Second Body. Begin the birth of this body gradually, by extending a hand or foot beyond your physical body. Increase the limb's vibrational rate if necessary, then touch some object near you. Push your hand or foot right through it; realize that you are not in a totally physical state anymore. Now, return the limb to coincide with your physical body and relax the vibrational rate. For most people, this is enough for the first time. Reduce the vibrations in your body and let the two bodies merge. Lie still as your body returns to normal. Go through the Grand Meditation a few more times before attempting full separation.

When you are committed to travel completely out of your body, go through the Seven Steps of Transformation until you are deeply entrained in the vibrational state. Feel your entire body vibrating and then start to roll, unfold, or lift yourself out of your body. Some people can simply jump free all at once. While performing this disassociation with your body, think about how light you are becoming. Truly desire to exist outside the body and dismiss any extraneous thoughts. You must use all your willpower. Feel yourself becoming lighter and lighter and think how wonderful it would be to exist in a subtle body. Hermes tells us how to do this in *Tractatus Aureus (The Golden Tract)*: “Take the flying volatile and drown it flying, draw it

from itself and repel it from itself, that it may live and answer you, not by flying away into the regions above but by truly forbearing to fly.”

Fear will pull you back into the body, so try to understand that nothing can harm you during the birth of your Second Body. You are still connected to your body by the golden umbilical, whether you can see it or not. Start by exploring the room you are in, and next time, travel through your entire apartment or home. Try to notice objects that will confirm to you that you are really out of your body. You are beginning the journey of a lifetime and the places you can visit are endless. All you have to do is think about them and you are there. After you experience the freedom of this boundless body, you can verify the words of the Fifth Rubric for yourself: “Thus will you obtain the Glory of the whole Universe. All Obscurity will be clear to you. This is the greatest Force of all powers, because it overcomes every Subtle thing and penetrates every Solid thing.”

Be patient in the practice of the Grand Meditation. The alchemists believed that ultimate success came in three broad stages they called “magisteriums,” to which they gave the names of different Stones. During the First Magisterium, the Lunar Stone is created. It represents gaining control over the body, so that every fiber and tissue can be completely relaxed. The Second Magisterium, the Solar Stone, is achieved when the mind is controlled through willpower, so that fear and ego do not interfere. The Third Magisterium is the union of the Lunar and Solar Stones with the cosmic presence to create the Stellar Stone or Astral Body. Seen another way, the Conjunction is the union of the Lunar Stone with the Solar Stone, the Marriage of the King and Queen, to create the Lesser Stone in which we become centered and gain control over mind and body. Coagulation, then, is the union of the Lesser Stone with the powers of the Above to create the Greater Stone of the Golden or Astral Body. Having achieved that Greater Stone, you have broken free of genetic, environmental, and even astrological restraints to your being and are free to express the bliss of your true Presence—the Stone. At this stage, you are born into the Universe and have arrived at a new plateau, the Greater Mysteries of the ancients. This is true atonement (at-one-ment) with the mind of God, and it allows you to enter the “graduate school” of spiritual instruction.

However, dematerialization is not the end, and getting into heaven is not the final stage in alchemy. As Hermes has repeatedly warned us, the eighth

stage is a step off the ladder of transformation and a return to where we started. “Its inherent Strength is perfected,” we are told, “if it is turned into Earth.” The successful Coagulation is only made real if it “descends again to Earth” and enters into the processes of projection and multiplication to perfect others. It is the return of Buddha, Mohammed, Christ, and all the saints. In this view, we are truly the Salt of the earth.

The Coagulated Person

Before the final Coagulation occurs in a person, he or she can appear to be arrogant or self-involved because of their preoccupation with finding perfection and divinity within themselves. Afterwards, they exude a unique Presence, a steady confidence in their daily activities, and others begin to see them as authentic and whole persons whom they want to emulate. People sense this higher Presence and want to worship it, which sometimes results in the quasi-religious following we observed in the lives of Balinas and Alexander. Modern examples include the Hindu gurus like Ramana Maharshi and Paramahansa Yogananda, and mystics like George Gurdjieff, who have huge followings worldwide.

The alchemists used the astrological cipher for the constellation Gemini to denote Coagulation, but also associated the characteristics of the Water signs Pisces and Aquarius with this final process of alchemy. The Divine Twins of Gemini represented the alchemical Rebis, whose melding of opposites was also closely associated with Hermes. The quest of the Gemini person is for endless variety. Those born under this Air sign are said to be full of life, mentally agile and responsive, versatile, and enjoy expressing themselves, but they live primarily in the mind and their free-flowing, mercurial personality can bother some people. Famous people born under the sign of the Twins include Laurence Olivier, Walt Whitman, Allen Ginsburg, John F. Kennedy, Hedda Hopper, Vincent Price, Wynonna Judd, Dennis Day, and Cyndi Lauper.

The introspective, dreamy Pisces person embodies the qualities of mind associated with projection, and the sign of Pisces denoted this part of the

Coagulation process. The Egyptians were using two fish to denote Pisces before 2300 B.C.E. and probably associated them with the interplay of cosmic and earthly forces that meet in the primal sea. Pisceans are said to have a constant awareness of cosmic forces that humbles them and keeps their egos in check, and according to Kathleen Burt in her book *Archetypes of the Zodiac* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn, 1996), the search of the Piscean is for the Castle of Peace. Kind and gentle almost to a fault, Pisceans are seen by others as self-sacrificing and empathetic individuals. Famous entertainers born under the sign of the Fish include Ron Howard, Sandy Duncan, Michael Bolton, Alan Thicke, Liza Minelli, and Billy Crystal.

The astrological cipher for Aquarius stood for a phase of Coagulation known as multiplication, in which the Stone multiplies itself and its powers. With the new millennium it is expected the entire planet will enter the cosmic Age of Aquarius, as Hermetic truths become self-evident. Again, according to astrologer Burt, the search of the Aquarian is for the Holy Grail. The individual Aquarian is marked by uniqueness, inventiveness, unconventionality, and vision, though they can have strong dislikes and stubborn opinions. They also seek to be appreciated and enjoy popularity and sensual gratification. Notable persons born under the sign of the Waterbearer include Federico Fellini, Ayn Rand, Norman Mailer, William Burroughs, Yoko Ono, James Dean, Rutger Hauer, John Belushi, Wolf-man Jack, Oprah Winfrey, Brett Butler, and Stockard Channing.

Part of the Hermetic truths that will become self-evident in the Age of Aquarius is that integration of mind and body is possible. The ability of the alchemist to direct the energies of his body consciously blesses him with great healing powers. Like Balinas, the alchemist can direct this living energy to heal others or apply it to his own body. This principle is the basis for stories about alchemists who live for hundreds of years.

[1](#) From an interview with François Trojani by Joseph Rowe published in *Gnosis* 40 (Summer 1996). Mr. Trojani is a practicing alchemist who may be contacted by writing to him (in French) in care of the bookstore La Table d'Émeraude (The Emerald Tablet), 21 Rue de la Huchette, 75005, Paris, France.

[2](#) From Annie Besant, *From the Outer Court to the Inner Sanctum* (Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 1983). Annie Besant (1847-1933) was a noted Victorian orator who worked tirelessly to spread her

teachings of human service and spiritual evolution. She also authored *Thought Power: Its Control and Culture* (Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989). Two biographies about her life are Rosemary Dinnage, *Annie Besant* (Albany, New York: Delmar, 1986) and Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant: A Biography* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1992).

3 From Dr. Dell Sokol, “Spiritual Breakthrough in Sex,” published as a chapter in *Enlightened Sexuality: Essays on Body-Positive Spirituality*, edited by Georg Feuerstein (Freedom, California: Crossing Press, 1989).

4 Dr. Edward Berridge, as quoted in Francis King, *Astral Projection, Magic and Alchemy* (London: Neville Spearman Publishers, 1971) and in Chic and Tabatha Cicero, eds., *The Golden Dawn Journal: The Art of Hermes* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1995).

5 See Carl Jung and Wolfgang Pauli, *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*, Princeton University Bollingen Series LI (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955).



Chapter 18

THE ALCHEMY OF HEALTH AND LONGEVITY

Dissolving the Four Elements

Tales of alchemists who live for hundreds of years were usually attributed to their discovery of a kind of physiological Philosopher's Stone, which they transmuted from the elements of their own body. However, exactly how the elements expressed themselves in the human body became a hotly contested issue among medieval alchemists. According to the traditional view, exposed by Galen, a second-century Roman physician, each of the four elements has its liquid counterpart that behaves like a bodily fluid or hormone affecting our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. For instance, the hot and dry Fire Humor, found in the body in a substance called red bile, causes a choleric, sardonic, "bitter" temperament dominated by the thinking function. A person with too much Fire Humor exhibits nervous twitches and tends to be excitable, headstrong, impatient, and angry. A balanced amount of Fire results in an energetic, insightful, and inventive personality.

The hot and moist Air Humor, represented by blood, results in a sanguine, down-to-earth, "salty" temperament dominated by the intuitive function. An excess of the Air Humor causes a person to have a ruddy complexion and blush easily, and may cause one to live in a fantasy world. The correct amount of Air results in a lively, optimistic, and communicative person. The cold and moist Water Humor, represented by phlegm and mucus, causes a phlegmatic, innocent, "sweet" temperament dominated by the feeling function. An excess of the Water Humor causes a person to have a runny nose or teary eyes and appear sluggish, callous, and outwardly unemotional. The balanced amount of Water results in a person of great empathy, understanding, and deep-flowing feelings. The cold and dry Earth Humor, detected in the body as a black bile, causes a melancholic, "sour" temperament dominated by the sensory function. An excess of the Earth

Humor causes diarrhea and a pessimistic, brooding disposition. The correct amount of Earth results in a practical, down-to-earth personality full of kindness and love.



The Tree of Life grows through the Seven Stages of alchemy. (Basil Valentine, Occulta Philosophia, Frankfort 1603)

According to this view of the elements within human beings, the health of body and mind requires the correct mixture and symmetry of the four humors, and excess humors cause imbalance and “dis-ease.” The physician’s

insight and a few tests, such as holding the patient's urine up to a light to try to detect excess humors, were all that guided diagnosis. For early physicians, it was obvious that a ruddy or flushed person needed to be bled, that phlegm caused the common cold, that yellow bile caused jaundice, and that cholera was caused by a choleric temperament. The offending humors were balanced by stimulating and activating opposing humors in a principle known as "contrary cures contrary." Using a variety of substances classified according to their hot, cold, wet, and dry properties, the physician dispensed his cure. His arsenal included not only herbs and mushrooms, but also eggshells, ostrich feathers, viper's blood, mummy flesh, feces from rare animals, and even ground unicorn horn. It took nearly fourteen centuries before anyone suspected there might be something wrong with this system of medicine and another three centuries before he was proven right.

Paracelsus: The Akhenaten of Medicine

Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim is widely considered one of the greatest physicians of all time. Thankfully, for his biographers at least, he also went by the name of Paracelsus. Born in 1498 in Switzerland, he was the son of a German physician and chemist. When Paracelsus was only nine years old, his mother committed suicide by jumping off a bridge, and he moved with his father to Austria. As a young boy, he trained in a mining school near Villach, but at the age of fourteen, he decided to become a doctor and left home to attend medical school. During the next five years Paracelsus attended seven prestigious universities throughout Europe yet found no teacher he respected. "How have the high colleges managed," he wondered, "to produce so many high asses? The universities do not teach all things, so a doctor must seek out old wives, gypsies, sorcerers, wandering tribes, old robbers, and such outlaws and take lessons from them. A doctor must be a traveler, for knowledge is experience."

At the age of seventeen, Paracelsus managed to acquire a degree in medicine from the University of Vienna, and six years later he was awarded his doctorate from the University of Ferrara. During the next decade, he

gained practical experience as a wandering physician and army surgeon in nearly every country in Europe, and then traveled to Arabia and Egypt to complete his study of alchemy.¹

The recovery of the *Corpus Hermeticum* was one of the major intellectual events of the Renaissance, and it is clear from his writings that Paracelsus borrowed from it heavily in formulating his approach to medicine. However, his primary inspiration was the Emerald Tablet. “The ancient Emerald Tablet,” he chided his fellow doctors, “shows more art and experience in philosophy, alchemy, magic, and the like, than could ever be taught by you and your crowd of followers.” He called himself the “Hermes Trismegistus of the Mechanical Arcana,” by which he meant the use of drugs to treat disease, and actively sought to apply the principles of the tablet everywhere he could. Nevertheless, like all true alchemists, Paracelsus was careful not to divulge too much. “To write more about this mystery,” he admitted, “is forbidden and further revelation is the prerogative of the divine power. For this art is truly a gift of God; wherefore, not everyone can understand it.” Still, Paracelsus wrote much about the general principles in the tablet and openly preached the Doctrine of Correspondences between the Above and the Below. He also popularized the notion of three heavenly forces or principles, and was the first to call them Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt. He founded alchemistic medicine by stressing the importance of a patient’s thoughts and emotions in healing and thus introduced the notion of holistic health. He always tried to unleash in his patients their natural healing power and stressed the fundamental connection between mind and matter revealed in the tablet.

Like Akhenaten in ancient Egypt, Paracelsus sought to apply the principles of the Emerald Tablet to the culture in which he found himself. For their efforts, both men were considered iconoclasts and suffered persecution from established interests. Just as the priests of Amen tried to destroy the writings of Akhenaten, so were the books of Paracelsus banned by the Catholic Church. Their similarities did not end there, however, for the two men even resembled each other physically. Like Akhenaten, Paracelsus had a disproportionately large head, a pear-shaped torso with wide feminine hips, and protruding lips. There were even the same rumors that he was actually a woman or a eunuch. Unlike Akhenaten, however, Paracelsus was not born into a position of reverence, and without doubt he suffered derision because

of his strange appearance. That probably accounts for the development of Paracelsus's rude and self-praising behavior. In fact, an adjective formed from one of his middle names—bombastic—became synonymous with self-reverent, pompous language.

In 1527, Paracelsus accepted a position as professor in medicine at the University of Basel, but the staid Swiss town was hardly ready for this messianic freethinker. He had already declared himself Paracelsus—literally “beyond Celsus,” a renowned first-century Roman physician—and publicly burned the books of Galen and other revered physicians. Scandalously, he invited everyone, not just students, to attend his lectures, which he gave in the common German tongue instead of Latin. In his lectures, he constantly poked fun at the medical methodology of the time, calling physicians “couch-sitters” too lazy to go out into the world to look for cures that really worked. He declared the practice of bleeding to cure illness barbaric and exposed most of the accepted pharmaceutical remedies as worthless. He insisted that doctors stop dressing wounds with dried moss and dung that prevented draining and caused infections. “If you prevent infection,” he insisted over and over, “nature will heal the wound all by herself.” After just one semester, Paracelsus had infuriated so many doctors and druggists that he had to flee for his life in the middle of the night.

Penniless and with nowhere to stay, Paracelsus traveled extensively and lodged with friends. But he had not given up. He used the time to sharpen his arguments and revise his manuscripts, and he continued to upset the status quo. He declared that diseases of miners were caused by dust particles and not by the mountain spirits upset by their mining. He insisted that poisons were really chemical compounds and introduced the notion of proper dosages. Singlehandedly, he brought chemistry into the field of medicine. He experimented with hydrogen and prepared miraculous new medicines containing sulfur, copper, and iron, and he cured a virulent form of syphilis with mercury compounds. He was the first physician to realize that the agent that makes a man sick can also cure him if administered in small doses, thus foreshadowing modern ideas of vaccination and homeopathy. Carl Jung said of him: “We see in Paracelsus not only a pioneer in the domains of chemical medicine, but also in those of an empirical psychological healing science.”

Like Akhenaten, Paracelsus died relatively young under mysterious circumstances. In 1541, shortly after being expelled from his home in

Carinthia, he was offered asylum by the prince bishop of Salzburg. Even though that same town had once expelled him for “subversive activities,” he had no choice but to accept the invitation. Shortly after he arrived, he was severely beaten by assassins allegedly hired by the orthodox medical faculty of the University of Vienna. On September 24, he died alone in his small room at the White Horse Inn. No reason for his death was recorded, and he was hastily buried in the graveyard of Salzburg’s St. Sebastian Church. After Paracelsus was buried, officials turned up a suspicious will that distributed his assets to charity but made absolutely no mention of what was to be done with the many manuscripts he had written that were scattered in various cities across Europe.

Oddly, the distinctive figure of Paracelsus was reported in several places after he died, and rumors spread that he had achieved immortality by concocting the Philosopher’s Stone. There were more reports that his spirit had raised other dead spirits and was seen conversing with them. Three hundred years after he died, the corpse in the grave of Paracelsus was exhumed and identified as his own, but once again, no cause of his death could be determined. During a cholera epidemic in Austria in the 1850s, hundreds of the afflicted visited his grave hoping to be cured, and even today, ailing and crippled people can be seen kneeling next to his tombstone praying for cures.

Alchemistic Medicine

Paracelsus taught that each of the body’s organs behaved like an internal alchemist separating pure from impure and refining the essences of things. For instance, the lungs removed the essence of Air; the kidneys removed the essence of Water; the stomach removed the essence of Earth or food; and the brain removed the essence of Fire or consciousness. Like the planets in the cosmos and the metals in the earth, all seven organs worked together in the alchemy of the body. Illness occurred when any of the organs became polluted and their “directive force failed.” Paracelsus named the Grand Alchemist in the body the “Archeus,” a part of the divine in man that acted as

an intelligent or archetypal life force fighting for survival in the world of the elements.

This was an entirely different view of the four elements than that taught by Galen, who viewed them as humors circulating in the body. As we have learned, he believed that illness resulted from an excess of one humor over another. Paracelsus replaced this view with a new world system more in line with the teachings of the Emerald Tablet. At the heart of this system was the analogy between the macrocosm and the microcosm. For Paracelsus, the elements were more like vibrations or modes of manifestation—vertical links with universal prototypes.

Alchemy taught Paracelsus how to see these divine correspondences—or “signatures” as he called them—and use them to his advantage. One simple example is black hellebore, a flower that blooms in the middle of winter. Paracelsus considered that characteristic a visible signature of its rejuvenating power and prescribed it for his elderly patients in a dosage he also determined from the plant’s signature. Today, we know that the dosage he prescribed is exactly right to alleviate the effects of arteriosclerosis. Following the guidelines of the Emerald Tablet, one could even learn to transmute substances by “rewriting” their signatures. That may seem audacious, but Paracelsus believed it was man’s duty to reclaim his divinity and use his divinely inspired thoughts and imagination to change reality inside and outside the body. “He who is born in imagination discovers the latent forces of Nature,” he wrote. “Besides the stars that are established, there is yet another—Imagination—that begets a new star and a new heaven.”

In place of the Galenian slogan of “contrary cures contrary,” Paracelsus proposed “like cures like.” In physical terms, it meant that a poison in the body could be cured by a similar poison in a small dose. Based on his alchemical theory of similar signatures in widely varying substances, Paracelsus expanded the class of medicinals (previously limited to organic compounds from the plant and animal kingdoms) to include inorganic and metallic compounds from the mineral kingdom. This was another reason he called himself thrice-greatest, for his medicine included the powers of all three kingdoms of nature. In spiritual terms, Paracelsus’s dictum “like cures like” meant that the patient himself was involved in his cure, and using the proper imagery and suggestion could invoke one’s natural healing power and transmute the offending impurities, whether they be chemical poisons or

cancerous growths. It is no wonder the church fathers accused Paracelsus of sorcery after he usurped the divine curative power that the church wanted to monopolize. In defending himself, he said: “Man is superior to the stars if he lives in the power of superior wisdom. Such a person, being master over heaven and earth, by means of his will, is a magus, and magic is not sorcery but supreme wisdom.”

Taoist Magic and Alchemy

For Taoist alchemists too, magic and alchemy were one and the same. They saw the human body as a magical laboratory in which to work their transformation and, like Paracelsus, believed the body’s organs were vessels in which alchemical purification of matter took place to provide the psychospiritual essences needed for growth and health. Actually, the Taoists felt they were only “borrowing” the physical body and its organs to cultivate “the body beyond the body”—what Paracelsus named the Astral Body.

Oriental alchemists became proficient at harnessing these alchemical energies by using regulated breathing techniques based on principles similar to those espoused in the Emerald Tablet. That the “Wind carries it in its belly” became the central principle of their efforts to harness the energies of the Tao, since it was the belly which was the focus of their efforts and which became the cauldron of their transformation. Hermes’ enigmatic phrase describing Separation is another way of saying that energy follows thought, just as the primal chaos was transformed by the breath or Word of God. They called the life force carried by the Wind *chi* and believed it was transmitted by the breath, stored in the belly, and from there circulated throughout the body. They saw the vertical axis of the body as a tier of three crucibles in which they performed their alchemy. By reviewing this entire process, we can easily see how each of the Seven Steps in Taoist alchemy are driven by breath.

The lowest and largest of the three internal crucibles, known as the Cauldron or Three-Footed Furnace, is in the belly. The Middle Crucible is located in the solar plexus and diaphragm area, and the Third Crucible is in

the head, between and behind the eyes in the area of the pineal gland. The alchemical operations practiced at the level of the Cauldron are Calcination and Dissolution, and the unpurified, primal energy there is known as *ching*. This undifferentiated sexual energy is part of the Tao of Darkness or the One Thing. The alchemist begins his Work by concentrating on his breathing and trying to direct the moving vitality of *chi* to the Cauldron in the belly. By directing the breath energy to the belly, the heat of the Cauldron is increased and eventually cooks and transforms the *ching*. At this point, Separation takes place, and the energy rises into the Conjunction phase in the Middle Crucible of the lungs, where it is combined with pure *chi* in the process of inspiration called Fermentation. During the ensuing Distillation, the product of Fermentation sublimates in the highest crucible in the head, where it combines with a luminous, spiritual energy called *shen*. The Taoists viewed this last phase as a copulation of feminine and masculine forces between their “inner dragon” and the “inner tiger,” which are the Mercury and Sulfur of Western alchemists.

As the triple essence of *ching-chi-shen* is distilled, it mingles with the cosmic energies of the Tao of Light or the One Mind. Coagulation begins when an “ambrosia” flows from the pineal gland to the pituitary gland and accumulates like saliva in the mouth. On the subtle level, two lights then appear in the brain, one a golden light and the other a silvery one, and together they descend into the Cauldron in the belly. There, the subtle lights impregnate the swallowed ambrosia and create a psychophysical fetus or “crystal child”—what Western alchemists would have called the *Homunculus* (little man) or *Parvulus* (little boy). As this Child of the Philosophers grows, the body’s normal breathing ceases and is replaced by an internal or fetal breath. Finally, during birth, the child travels a reverse path into the brain, where it is born as an immortal in a body of light that incorporates the consciousness of the alchemist and unites it with the consciousness of the whole universe. The matured Child of the Philosophers is the ultimate prize in Western alchemy, the Philosopher’s Stone.

The Stone That Is No Stone

For both Taoist and Western alchemists, the culmination of their Work was the eternal body they called the Stone. It was the ultimate prize and greatest secret of alchemy. “It is not proper to say much about the Philosopher’s Stone or to boast about its possession,” Paracelsus cautioned. “The ancients have indicated the recipe for those who have true understanding. However, they used parables to keep unworthy persons from knowing and misusing it.” The symbols the alchemists used in their parables included hailstones, meteorites, gold coins, a golden egg, androgynous youths or angels, salt, a heavenly-scented balsam, and the Elixir or ambrosia (food of immortality). In the tarot, the properties of the Stone are depicted by the Sun, World, Judgment, and Wheel of Fortune cards. These symbols all suggest a consummation of powerful energies that result in the perfection of matter. Sometimes a house, castle, or entire city, such as the eight-gated city of Jerusalem, depicts the Coagulation, while other times the image is of a heavy cubic stone that floats in the sky.

According to the alchemists, the properties of the Stone are indeed profound. It enables its owner to know all languages, including the languages of birds and animals, and with it we can observe all heavenly influences and see all possible futures. The Stone also allows its owner to seek out the location of anyone in the world, even if they are hiding. It allows one to peer into concealed places including closets, chambers, caves, or the most inaccessible caverns of the earth. The Stone can transmute and perfect anything it touches. It can instantly rejuvenate the human body and can cure any disease. In a moment of weakness, even Paracelsus spoke of its wondrous properties: “The Stone is like the Fire which purifies the rotten and soiled salamander and makes him to be born anew. It purifies the body of its natural filth, with all new and young forces, so that no fault remains in it. All things which corrupt nature must yield before it.”

So, despite being a great secret, discussion of the Stone, like that of the First Matter, knew no end in alchemy. “Amongst all great philosophers it is agreed that our Stone is no stone,” said the Arabian alchemist Geber in *Liber Trium Verborum (Book of Three Worlds, 800 C.E.)*, “but amongst the ignorant it is ridiculous and incredible. For who will believe that water can be made a stone, and a stone water, nothing being more difficult than these two? And yet in truth it is so. For this very permanent Water is the Stone, but while it is water it is no stone.”

The Italian alchemist Petrus Bonus described the formation of the Stone in his widely-acclaimed *Pretiosia Margarita Novella (New Pearl of Great Price, 1572)*: “We say that the Coagulum of the Sages is that which has been called the Ferment of the Body, or the Poison, or the Flower of Gold. Know that this Coagulum is the Key of the Sages, because when it coagulates the spirit, it at the same time dissolves the body—the Coagulation of spirit and the solution of the body thus being the same thing. That is why the philosophers have written that the spirits cannot be detained except by the water of their own bodies.”

The simultaneous Dissolution of the body and Coagulation of spirit referred to by Petrus Bonus is the Emerald Formula (*Solve et Coagula*), which describes the formation of the Second Body created in the flames of consciousness. “Our Stone is Fire,” noted the ancient Greek philosopher Democritus, “created out of Fire and converted into Fire, and its soul dwells in the Fire.” Once again, Paracelsus spells out what he has promised to hide from us: “If you wish to succeed in such a Work, you must separate spirit and life in nature, and make the astral soul in yourself tangible; then the substance of your soul will appear visibly.” Thus, the Stone, the Salt of the alchemists, is the same thing sought by the Taoists—the glorified Second Body that participates throughout the vertical axis of reality within the ouroboric Fountain of Fountains.

“Pure Salt of the earth is formed in the cauldron,” wrote the sixteenth-century Polish alchemist Michael Sendivogius. “This now has to be dissolved and concentrated, and purified and rinsed, until it becomes beautifully transparent and crystalline. It then acquires the philosopher’s earth, our Salt, which rises in the sea of the world, the Water which does not wet the hands, without which nothing in this world can be born or come to exist. Thus you have in your hands the secret of all Philosophers and the source of the Spring, or the hiding place of Nature. It is in this secret that the Spirit of Nature and the whole worlds resides. Both life and health proceed from this.”²

The “source of the Spring, the hiding place of Nature” is the One Thing of Hermes that is sometimes glimpsed by human beings. It is what I saw on that Illinois prairie when I was a boy, what mystics have seen down through the ages, and what is observed today as angels, balls of light, and other “paranormal” phenomena. What the alchemists knew that we do not realize is

that that chaotic energy can be harnessed through the power of purified thought. One modern example of this is happening at the Biscayne Institutes of Health in Miami, Florida. The institute was founded in 1988 by Dr. Marie Dicowden, a former faculty member of the University of Miami Medical School. In order to speed up the rehabilitation of brain and spinal cord injury patients, Dr. Dicowden combined traditional with holistic treatments and started applying the principles of the Emerald Tablet. Soon, healing “balls of energy” began appearing during meditation and clinical massage sessions that were witnessed by patients and staff alike. The focal point of the phenomenon seems to be an eighty-foot-diameter skylighted room at the center of the main building, and many miraculous recoveries have been attributed to the redirected energy. “The Emerald Tablet is the process we have been experiencing,” notes Dr. Dicowden. “I know what it means in my very own body, but I am trying to translate it into the more traditional setting of healthcare in this country.”



The alchemists drink from the hidden waters of rebirth. (Daniel Mylius, Philosophia Reformata , Frankfurt 1622)

The Grand Elixir

In physiological alchemy, life and health flow from the Stone in the form of the Elixir. It is said this True Medicine could restore a man of eighty to the youth of a child in twenty-eight days. In the same way that the Stone perfected any substance, the Elixir perfected any living tissue. In many ways, the Grand Elixir was the principle of life itself, the vital force or the spirit of life, the “blessed greenness” contained within the Emerald Tablet. Just as a sample of the Elixir is said to be contained in the original tablet, so do the

tablet's words announce this unexpected spirit, the "something wonderful" that alchemists believe resides in all of us.

There are many tales of alchemists obtaining the Elixir and living for hundreds of years. Around 140 C.E., Taoist alchemist Wei Po Yang tried the Elixir on himself, his assistant, and his white dog. They went to the mountains where they appeared to die, but all three returned within a month totally rejuvenated and seemingly immortal. The European alchemist Comte de St. Germain was considered a native of several countries and spoke twelve different languages fluently. Documents indicate he lived at least from 1710 to 1822, but according to sources in the court of Louis XV of France, St. Germain possessed the Elixir that prolonged his life to ten times the normal span. Through his alchemy, it was said, the fabulously rich man could also remove flaws from precious gems and turn lead into gold. "He is the greatest philosopher I know," the renowned philosopher Voltaire said of him. "A man who never dies, never seems to age, and who knows everything." The last sighting on record was in the late nineteenth century, when St. Germain told a French historian that he was going to England to work on the steam engine and then on to America to apply his knowledge to the building of railroads.³

In another case, a Paris notary by the name of Nicholas Flamel became one of the most celebrated of all Western alchemists. His transformation began in 1357, when he acquired a strange alchemy book written by Abraham Eleazar, a wandering Jewish alchemist who wrote at least one other book, *The Book of Hieroglyphics*, that is still on display in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. Flamel said his book was written on leaves of tree bark, and on every seventh page one of three symbols was inscribed: a caduceus, a crucified Serpent, or the scene of a snake-infested desert with wonderful Fountains.

After doing a little research, Flamel discovered that Eleazar was a Cabalistic alchemist who was supposed to have changed mercury into gold to pay the taxes of persecuted Jews. Working closely with his wife, Pernelle, Nicholas deciphered the text, and finally, on January 17, 1382, learned the secret of transmutation and successfully created gold from mercury. After much "contemplation on the works of nature," the couple prepared the "Elixir of the Red Stone." It is known for a fact that Flamel suddenly became rich beyond anyone's expectations, and he also began authoring very learned

books on alchemy. Then, in 1416, he wrote a voluminous will in which he related the story of his discovery of Eleazar's book and subsequent transmutations. He donated his massive fortune to charity, and three chapels, seven churches, and fourteen hospitals were built in his memory. In the gardens of these buildings were statues of Flamel as well as archways and pillars which contained the hieroglyphic drawings of Eleazar.

Flamel had left such meticulous instructions on his burial that rumors quickly spread that his grave was empty, and he had instead left France to travel the world. In fact, so little respect was given his burial plot that his tombstone ended up being used as a chopping stone for herbs. For the next four hundred years, Flamel was sighted throughout Europe and the rest of the world. In 1761, a dozen people reported seeing Flamel and his wife back in Paris, attending the opera. In his *Journey Through Asia Minor*, explorer Paul Lucas reported meeting a member of a secret group of seven Sons of Hermes at a mosque in Bronosa, Natolia. The man, who spoke many languages, told Lucas that the seven men assembled every twenty years to exchange news on what they had learned in their travels. The man looked about thirty years old but claimed to be nearly a century in age. "Hereditary disease and weakness reduce the life of man," the alchemist told him, "but the sage, by the use of the True Medicine, can ward off whatever may hinder or impair the animal functions for a thousand years." When Lucas inquired whether the man was acquainted with the stories about Flamel, he replied: "Flamel is still living; neither he nor his wife are dead. It is not above three years since I left both in the Indies."

The alchemist then went on to explain in great detail how a representative of King Charles VI visited Flamel to inquire about the notary's sudden riches and what he knew of alchemy. Flamel recognized the danger and immediately sent his wife to Switzerland to wait for him. Then he informed people she had died and held a funeral for her, after which he made arrangements for his own fake interment. Lucas swore the story was absolutely true, and there are other travelers even today who come across Nicholas Flamel and his wife in the far corners of the earth.⁴

Whether or not the alchemists actually succeeded in living for centuries, there can be no doubt they were actively searching for a way to accomplish just that. In the next chapter we will examine a highly regarded method of

distilling the Elixir using an alchemical “apparatus” built into the human body. This psychophysical ladder has been used for millennia as an escape route for the immortal human soul into the “Subtle Sea Above,” and by uniting the powers of the Above and Below, it also has the potential to prolong life in the earthly domain as well. Known as the caduceus, the magical wand of Hermes, it is the vertical axis of creation reflected in the human anatomy.

[1](#) My interpretation of the life of Paracelsus is based on Roman von Rolbenhoyer, *Die Kindheit des Paracelsus (The Childhood of Paracelsus)* (Munich, Germany: Langen-Muller, 1933); Henry Pachter, *Paracelsus: Magic into Science* (New York: Henry Schuman Inc., 1951); Allen Debus, *The English Paracelsians* (New York: Franklin Watts Inc., 1966); Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine and The Smiling Spleen: Paracelsianism in Storm and Stress* (Basel, Switzerland: Karger, 1982). Original sources are from Jolande Jacobi, ed., *Paracelsus: Selected Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books and the Bollingen Foundation, 1951) and A. E. Waite, *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus the Great* (Chicago: Laurence Scott, 1910; Kila, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1991).

[2](#) From Zbigniew Szdto, *Water Which Does Not Wet the Hands: The Alchemy of Michael Sendivogius* (Warsaw, Poland: Polish Academy of Sciences, 1994).

[3](#) Information on the life of the alchemist St. Germain was compiled from Isabel Cooper-Oakley, *Compte De St. Germain: The Secret of Kings* (Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 1986) and *Compte De St. Germain, The Most Holy Trinosophia: With Introductory Material* (Los Angeles, California: Philosophical Research Society, 1983).

[4](#) The life of Nicholas Flamel is based on Arthur Edward Waite, *Alchemists Through the Ages* (Blauvelt, New York: Steiner Publications, 1970). Original sources include EtienneFrançoisVillain, *Essai d’une Histoire de Nicolas Flamel (Essays Regarding a History of Nicholas Flamel)*, Paris, 1758), and *Histoire Critique de Nicolas Flamel (A Critical History of Nicholas Flamel)*, Paris, 1761). Flamel’s *Le Livre de Figures Hieroglyphiques (Book of the Hieroglyphical Figures)*, Paris, 1415) is examined in a book edited by Laurinda Dixon, *Nicolas Flamel: His Exposition of the Hieroglyphical Figures* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994).



Chapter 19

MESSAGE OF THE CADUCEUS

The Staff of Hermes

Could a commercial logo that we see nearly every day, that we regularly pass on the streets without noticing, carry a profound Hermetic message for each one of us? The caduceus, sign of the medical and healing arts, is an ancient symbol of bodily alchemy that has been traced as far back as 2600 B.C.E. The caduceus is depicted on the Libation Cup of Gudea, a Sumarian artifact that was made around 2000 B.C.E., and Thoth is shown holding an early Egyptian caduceus in a mural at the Temple of Seti I that dates from 1300 B.C.E. (see page 23). The tall staff, the “magic wand” of Hermes, is topped by a winged solar disk with two serpents wrapped around the staff three times—a subtle reminder that the owner of the staff is the thrice greatest one. According to the immortal French alchemist Nicholas Flamel, the two serpents of the caduceus are “the snakes or dragons which the ancient Egyptians painted in the form of a circle, each biting the other’s tail, in order to teach that they spring of and from One Thing.”

In mythology, the caduceus was first discovered by Tiresias, a blind seer consulted by King Oedipus. One day Tiresias was hiking on Mount Kyllene in Greece and discovered two snakes copulating alongside the road. In an attempt to separate the snakes, he stuck his walking staff between them. Immediately, Tiresias was turned into a woman and remained so for seven years until he once again found two serpents copulating and repeated his action. At that moment, Tiresias was transformed back into a man. Later, Zeus and Hera got into an argument about who experienced more pleasure in sex and decided to consult Tiresias, who ought to know. Tiresias agreed with Zeus that women had more fun. That angered Hera, who blinded Tiresias, though Zeus bestowed him with the gift of prophecy out of gratitude. An upright stone phallus marking the entrance to a cave on Mount Kyllene was

said to be the birthplace of Hermes, and it was there that Tiresias's staff, complete with the entwined snakes, was passed on to him. Fortunately, the clever Hermes was able to harness the staff's polarity-reversing power and was clever enough never to answer questions from feuding gods.

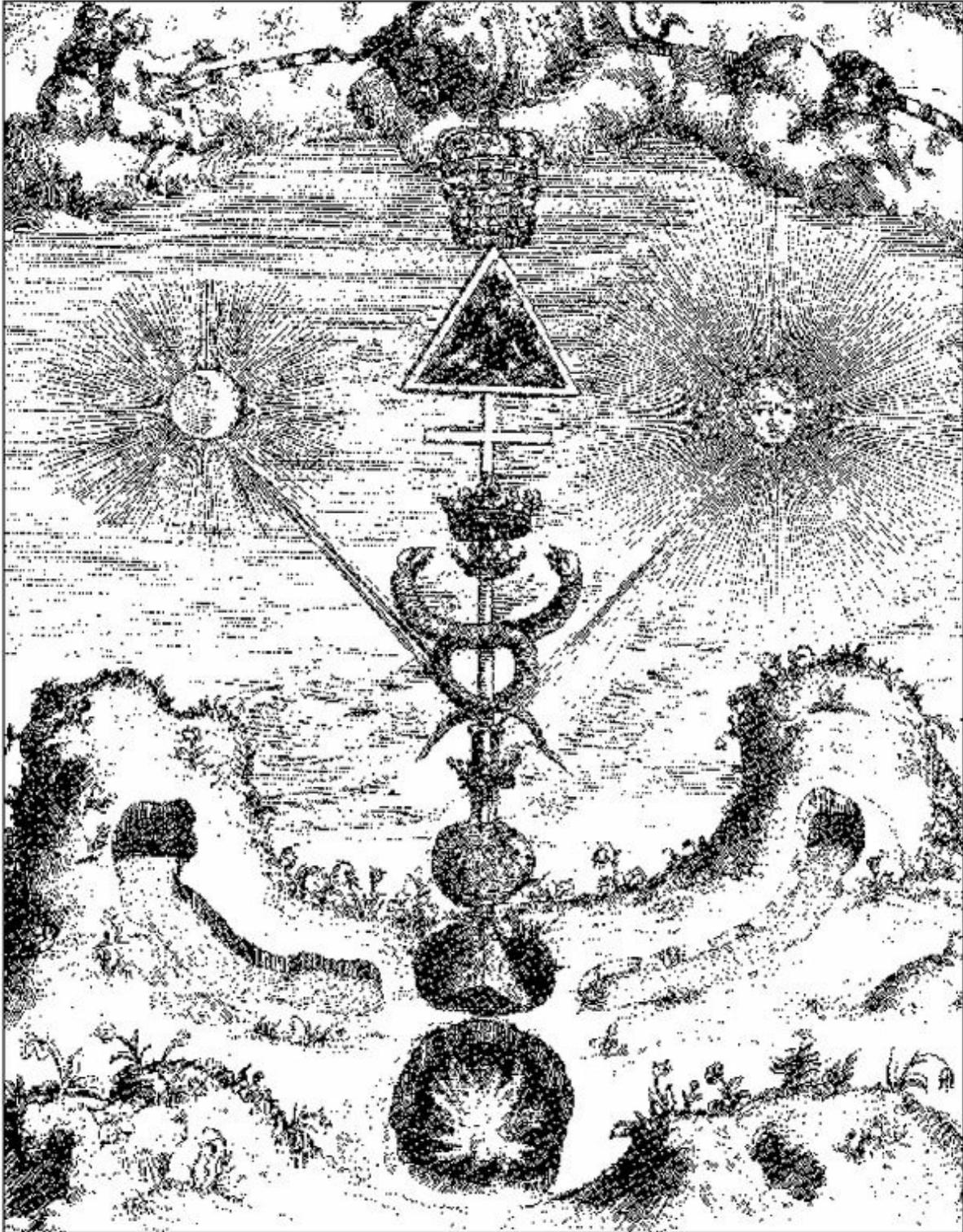
In this way were the three forces of alchemy incorporated into the Staff of Hermes. Sulfur and Mercury are the two entwined serpents and the staff itself is the resulting energy channel of Salt. The four elements are also present. Earth is the base of the staff where it touches the ground; Water is the staff's hidden power as a universal solvent; Air is represented by the two wings; and Fire is contained in the solar disk at the top. Taken together, these seven Hermetic elements correspond to the Seven Stages described in the Emerald Tablet, and one of the most powerful secrets of the alchemists was that the tablet's Pattern is mirrored in the vertical axis of the human body.

The Hieroglyph of the Stone

The illustration on page 313 is a schematic representation of the caduceus called "The Hieroglyph of the Stone," which shows the Seven Stages of Transformation. Published in a seventeenth-century French book called *Le Triomphe Hermetique: La Pierre Philosophale Victorieuse (The Hermetic Triumph: The Philosopher's Stone Victorious)*, the drawing is said to divulge the secret of uniting the Above and the Below within the human body. Its caption is a quote from Hermes: "The venerable Stone is hidden in the Cavern of the Metals." The Cavern of the Metals is both in the earth and in our bodies, and the imposing scene is full of Hermetic symbols. Above in the heavens are the three constellations of spring: Gemini, Taurus, and Aries. According to alchemical lore, this is the only time of year when celestial influences are correct for the Marriage of Heaven and Earth to take place. In the sky are a youthful Sun and Moon whose opposing archetypal energies also contribute, and Below, Water, Air, and the Earth itself assist in the miracle of the caduceus. Fire begins the process, hidden underground at the root of the caduceus at the level of the base of the spine, where Calcination takes place. Next, the Fire moves up into the boiling retort of the genitals

where the watery life force is added. Supported by a tripod of rising Fire, this vessel is where Dissolution takes place, at the level of our sex organs. At this stage we have produced the “First Mercury” and gain a princely crown for our accomplishment. The essences of soul and spirit become visible serpents entwined around the caduceus at the level of the solar plexus where Separation takes place. The second Water or “Philosophic Mercury” is produced here. The serpents come together in Conjunction, the Marriage of the King and Queen, symbolized by their hovering crowns at what would be the heart level in man.

A horizontal bar is the barrier that marks the transitions between the Above and Below. The cross it makes on the staff is the sign of the crucifixion of the two rising serpents. In man, it is at the level of his outstretched shoulders, and this is where the Putrefaction and Fermentation of the product of the Conjunction takes place to produce the Secret Fire. If Fermentation is successful, there is resurrection of life on a higher level in the head. The large upward-pointing triangle, the glyph for Fire, contains the Phoenix rising from the flames. This is the consecration and ultimate purification of the Distillation phase behind the forehead. The final Coagulation, symbolized by the Triple Crown of the thrice-greatest, has brought together all three realms of body, mind, and spirit in one glorious Stone at the top of the head. This Stone touches both the Above and Below, uniting their powers in one entity that embodies the “Glory of the Whole Universe.”



A schematic of the caduceus shows the Seven Steps along a vertical axis connecting heaven and earth. (Limojon de Saint-Didier, Le Triomphe Hermetique, Amsterdam 1689)

The Ladder of the Planets

The seven parts of the caduceus correspond to the order of operations described in the Emerald Tablet and make up an alchemical ladder. The ladder, in turn, corresponds to the seven planets of galactic evolution and the seven metals associated with them. Starting at the base of the caduceus, they are: Saturn (lead), Jupiter (tin), Mars (iron), Venus (copper), Mercury (mercury), the Moon (silver), and the Sun (gold). The goal of personal alchemy is to transmute these metals in the human body and mind from baser into nobler. The true nature and power of these psychophysical metals is difficult for the modern mind to grasp; however, it is an idea that goes at least as far back as the translators of the Emerald Tablet in Alexandria. “There is a ladder with seven gates and above that an eighth gate,” claims a Roman historian describing Persian alchemy at the turn of the first millennium. “The first gate is of lead, the second tin, the third of iron, the fourth of copper, the fifth of mixed metal, the sixth of silver, and the seventh of gold. The first gate they assign to Saturn, indicating by lead the slowness of this star ...”¹

Diane di Prima, in an essay on Paracelsus, captured the real mystery of the connection between the seven metals and their planets: “As it was with Sol and Gold, so it was also with the other metals and their planets. The metals had somehow the same virtue as the planet, or rather, a single spirit infused both planet and metal, one a celestial and one a terrestrial manifestation of the same force. This was not symbolism, but something much closer to literal speech, a fine line between the two which has been lost to us, and to our language.”²

In the orient, the seven psychophysical metals are known as “chakras,” which are knots or zones of energy that must be “untied” to achieve enlightenment. The Egyptians called them the Seven Passages. They are variously described as gates that open, wheels that are set spinning, or lotuses that bloom as the energy rises up the spine, and each rules over different emotions and personality traits. In Buddhist alchemy, there are four such knots of energy that relate to the four elements. In the Tantric alchemy of India, there are seven major knots located along the spine. The goal is to unite the Atman (female soul or essence) at the base of the spine with the

Brahman (male spirit or growth soul) at the top of the spine into a single unified presence, the Stone or Diamond Body.

The process of personal transformation begins at the bottom of the caduceus, as the First Matter, our leaden soul, begins its journey up the staff of perfection. Roused by the friction and heat of Calcination, the First Matter moves up the spine like an entranced cobra, burning off the seal of each chakra and transmuting the metal as it passes through it. In Tantrism, this serpentine force is called *kundalini* and is visualized lying dormant at the base of the spine, coiled around the phallic-shaped coccyx bone three times. In Western alchemy, Vitriol was seen as the agent of change. This highly corrosive acid was responsible for most chemical transformation, and the alchemists expected that a similar substance must exist in the human body. In other words, Vitriol, like *kundalini*, is the psychospiritual substance that drives our bodily, mental, and spiritual transformation. The rising vitriolic energy can be understood as a kind of cosmic sexuality, which, like all generative energy, is composed of two opposing forces. The solar masculine force of spirit and the lunar feminine force of soul start their ascent by twisting around the staff (the Tantric *sushumna*) in opposite directions and culminate at the top. When this serpentine energy reaches the seventh Gold Chakra at the top of the head, the adept is said to experience overwhelming bliss during which the forces of soul and spirit unite in a kind of “psigasm” (psychic orgasm) with cosmic forces to form a golden Salt, an imperishable Stone. This lasting state of consciousness was described by Gopi Krishna, an Indian government worker who glimpsed the Stone at the age of thirty-four.

“As the result of a day-to-day observable but still incomprehensible activity of a radiant kind of vital energy,” he wrote in *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (Shambhala Publications, 1997) “there has developed in me a new channel of communication, a higher sense through which I am able on occasions to have a fleeting glimpse of the mighty, indescribable world to which I really belong—as a slender beam of light, slanting into a dark room, does not belong to the room which it illuminates but to the effulgent sun millions and millions of miles away. I perceive a reality before which all that I treat as real appears insubstantial and shadowy, a reality more solid than myself, surrounded by my mind and ego, more solid than all I can conceive of, including solidity itself.”

This transcendent solidity is the Philosopher’s Stone of the West, which

takes wing at the top of the caduceus. Thus, Hermes' Staff represents the vertical axis of reality as it is manifested in man, which corresponds to the Above and Below described in the Emerald Tablet. It is almost as if when mankind stopped walking on all fours and stood upright, we aligned ourselves with the vertical axis of reality and our spiritual alchemy began.

Working with the Lead of the Caduceus

The lowest point on the Staff of Hermes is the starting point for our transformation, the operation of Calcination. The spot where the staff touches the ground represents the Earth element at the base of the spine, and this area is sometimes represented by a circle or ball attached to the bottom of the staff that is thought of as a reservoir of negative energy symbolized by the planet Saturn and the metal lead. For the ancients, Saturn is the galactic starting point on our journey in from the stars and stands for the archetypal preconditioning that gives life form and function. Of the seven visible planets, Saturn stands farthest from the sun and is composed of a brilliant ring circling a dark inner core. As Father Time, the slowest planet is representative of the limitations of time and space. Similarly, lead is the heaviest of the seven metals and is the starting point for their transformation into gold.

Saturn's metal is the oldest metal and is known for its stubborn durability and resistance to change. Lead products dating from 7000 B.C.E. have been found, and lead water pipes installed by the Romans over fifteen centuries ago are still used today. Outwardly, lead is a lusterless, almost gloomy metal, and though soft, it is brittle and unmalleable. Sheets of lead are impermeable to all forms of light, even high-energy X-rays and gamma rays, which makes lead the perfect shield against radiation. On the psychological level, lead is symbolic of a person's inertness and unwillingness to enter transformation or be affected by outside "radiations" such as attempts at spiritual instruction by others. Spiritually, it is a symbol of the First Matter in man, his ancient and stubborn soul.

Fire, however, is lord over lead, for the metal has a low melting point and

is easily separated from its ore by Calcination. Lead even contains the fire of its own transformation. A little known property of the metal is that if it is made into a fine powder, it immediately ignites when exposed to air and eventually consumes itself in flames. While it is not easy to pulverize lead because of its clumping characteristics, once made into a powder it must be kept in a vacuum to keep from catching fire. Therefore, lead is the perfect terrestrial incarnation of the archetypal powers of Saturn and also the perfect symbol for the First Matter in man and its snakelike counterpart in Kundalini yoga.

This “lead” accumulated at the bottom of the spine also contains the seed of our spiritual transfiguration. In the East, this area is known as the Root Chakra—what alchemists would have called the Lead Chakra—the center of physical experience at the base of the spine between the anus and the genitals. It is here that the powers of Calcination are focused, through breathing exercises, postures, muscle contortions, and meditation. Hindu mythology is rich in images that express the hidden signatures of the metals in man, and we will examine some of the images associated with the corresponding chakras in detail. In the Tantric tradition, the Root or Lead Chakra is visualized as a four-petaled lotus that inscribes a square representing the Earth element. Enclosed in the square, a massive elephant with seven trunks and a black collar symbolizes the First Matter. Above the elephant at the center of the square is an inverted triangle showing the root (or *lingam*) with a serpent curled around it three times and capped by the crescent moon.

The Hindu deity symbolizing the state of awareness at this lowest level is, surprisingly, the supreme god Brahma, usually at home only in the Above. Thus, the beginning of our ouroboric journey is also its end. With one of his four hands, Brahma makes a gesture telling us to have no fear. In the others, he holds a trident staff (the spine or thrice greatest caduceus), a sealed libation cup (for offerings), and a rosary. The rosary is strung with 108 beads which represent all the names of the Great Mother. In Hermetic terminology, she is the One Thing, source of everything in the cosmos. The Hindu deity symbolizing the energy of the Lead Chakra is a pink goddess with four arms. As if showing us how to conquer her, she holds up a sword (the quality of discrimination), a cup (the reservoir of ambrosia or vitriol), a spear (implying a target or goal), and a staff with a skull on top. This staff is the vertical axis

of the body, the Staff of Hermes, and the skull indicates a purified mind having died to the material world. This is the same meaning of the skull in medieval alchemical engravings and represents the goal of Calcination.

Using these personifications of the archetypal forces at work in the Lead Chakra, the alchemist attempts to activate the dormant energy contained there. By activating the True Imagination in a meditative state, the fiery consciousness of the alchemist is directed to the cauldron of transformation in the sacral area. Psychologically, the concerns at the Lead Chakra are those of self-preservation, and this is where most of our fear comes from. It is the seat of paranoia, addiction, and blind projection of our own faults onto others. By transmuting the Lead here, we examine our beliefs, habits, and fears consciously and try to integrate their energy on a higher level. Gradually, the cauldron begins to boil and the energy, visualized either as a twisting serpent or acidic vitriol, begins its journey up the spine, which is the seven-stepped ladder of alchemy.

Working with the Tin of the Caduceus

The Caduceus of Hermes is symbolic of the ideal human body in which the forces released by Dissolution move freely throughout the entire person. Kundalini yoga attempts to free this watery energy by focusing attention on the major blockages. One of the most tightly locked-up blockages in modern man is the second or Genital Chakra. Located above the genital area but below the navel in the spine, this six-petaled lotus is associated with the Water element. The planet here is Jupiter and the metal tin, which is why the Genital Chakra is referred to as the Tin Chakra in spiritual alchemy. The mythological attributes of Jupiter are expansion, fluency, and joviality. Jupiter was the great god of rolling thunder and no metal reproduces his hallmark better than a shaken sheet of tinfoil, which some theaters still use to simulate thunderstorms.

Psychologically, the focus at the Tin Chakra is on sensuality and there is greater interaction with others than seen in the leaden person. Still, most of the control at this level comes from unconscious impulses, and the Tin

Chakra is considered the root of the subconscious. As tin is transformed, a person is dominated by dreams and powerful undercurrents of emotion. Only by fully integrating the contents of the personal unconscious can tin be fully transmuted into a higher metal.

In the East, the Tin Chakra is represented by the crescent moon and a sea monster which carries the goddess of the oceans. The goddess symbolizes the type of energy at this level and is depicted as having a fierce-looking face with three eyes. In her four hands she displays four objects depicting her situation: a trident (representing the three aspects of reality over which she rules), a battle axe (the everyday struggle of just living), a drum (the sexual and emotional power of rhythm and stimulation), and a lotus. The white lotus flower exhibits many similarities with the alchemy of the spirit because it grows in muddy waters, rising from the murky depths without being stained, to seek the light of the sun. The deity symbolizing the intelligence at this level is the dark-blue, four-armed god Vishnu, symbol of the all-pervading life force, who is seated on a red lotus. In one of his hands, Vishnu holds a conch shell, symbolic of the soft sounds from one's essence that can only be heard if the talkative mind is stilled. In the hand below the one with the conch, he holds a mace or club meant to subdue and kill the ego and inferior aspects of the personality. On the other side of his body, he holds a disk used in a target game that symbolizes the powers of concentration necessary to succeed. In the other hand, he gently grasps an eight-petaled lotus, which stands for the spiritual goal of perfecting the First Matter hidden in the Root or Lead Chakra.

To summarize the message of the symbols exemplified in this chakra: we can free the watery energy of the second chakra by concentrating on eliminating the forces of personality and ego which limit its flow. That is accomplished through mental exercises that heighten intuitive perception and with physical exercises and massage therapies that heighten bodily awareness. Repressed feelings form knots or blockages in our bodies that cause symptoms of armoring reminiscent of the "tin man." These blockages have both a psychic and a physiological reality, and often it is necessary to seek outside assistance in removing them. Alchemical Kinesiology uses massage techniques to dissolve these blockages, allowing healing energy to flow throughout the body. Some of the methods, like Rolfing, use deep connective tissue manipulation, while others, like Reiki, use only a light

touch at specific locations to stimulate the movement of trapped life force. Still others, like the Rosen Method, use a combination of massage and verbal communication to identify repressed emotions. Today, nearly every major city has practitioners of these and similar arts available to the aspiring alchemist to help him or her transmute the hardened tin in their bodies into gold.

Working with the Iron of the Caduceus

Like their Oriental counterparts, Western alchemists believed the psychic center for the element of Air was in the belly, between the diaphragm and solar plexus behind the navel. From that location, the Air element fans the fires at the base of the caduceus in the Lead Chakra. Thus, the forces of air and willpower originating in the diaphragm and solar plexus are directed to the Lead Chakra as part of the Separation process. Often, this is interpreted as a visit to hell or the molten bowels of the earth or crossing the River of Dissolution to the Other Side. In fact, one chemical indicator of the Separation is sulfurous emissions such as brimstone or sulfur dioxide (a rotten-egg smell), which are released in many of the laboratory experiments at this stage. Such odors have long been connected with breaking through to the Other Side and are part of both mythological and “true life” encounters with devils, ghosts, and aliens. However, these foul, biting sensations originate from the fires of Calcination burning forever out of control in Saturn’s hell and are not inherent in Separation, which tries to balance the forces of the Above with the forces of the Below.

Western alchemists associated the operation of Separation with the planet Mars and the metal iron. Iron is the second oldest metal known to man (after lead) and was smelted by the Egyptians at least as far back as 1500 B.C.E., but throughout its history it has always served man’s will—in his weaponry or in the industrial conquest of nature. In classical mythology, the Age of Iron is the final and worst age of the world, marked by selfishness and degeneracy. The negative expression of iron is in the coldhearted struggle for material possessions in a world in which only the fittest (or the richest)

survive. Yet iron also represents willpower and courage, the two most vital attributes for successful Separation and the basic requirement for visiting hell and retrieving the essence of soul. In psychological terms, the Iron Chakra is the seat of the will to power, control, and concerns about providing for one's physical needs in the world. By transmuting Iron, we learn to assert ourselves without dominating or submitting to others. We gain insight into our behavior and become aware of the forces of soul within.

Separation can often be a violent operation, and alchemists have always associated it with the color red. As we have learned only recently, it is massive amounts of iron oxide which give the planet Mars its red hue, though that would hardly have surprised the ancients. "The Sun produces gold; the Moon silver; Saturn lead; and Mars iron," said the fifth-century Byzantium alchemist Proklos. Despite such ancient references, only a few modern chemists have accepted the planet-metal relationship. In her book *Workings of the Stars in Earthly Substance* (Vienna, 1926), Austrian chemist Lilly Kolisko summarized the results of years of experimentation that demonstrated the effects of planetary changes on corresponding metals on earth. Using simple chromatographic methods, she proved that at the time of some celestial event involving two or more planets, such as a Conjunction or opposition, the chemical behavior of the associated metals also changes. For instance, if iron sulfate and silver nitrate solutions are mixed in equal proportions in a container and a cylindrical filter paper is inserted, characteristic patterns appear on the filter paper. However, during a Moon-Mars event, these consistent patterns change dramatically. Significant changes can also be recorded when lead compounds are substituted for Saturn events, or tin compounds for Jupiter events. Ironically, more support for the planet-metal connection comes from the world of metals trading, where fluctuations in the value of copper and gold have been statistically correlated to lunar and solar conjunctions with the planets.³

In the human body, the iron in blood makes it red and fuels metabolism. When we inhale, the iron molecule hemoglobin binds with oxygen and distributes it throughout the body; when we exhale, it unites with carbon dioxide and carries the by-products of our combustion back to the lungs where they are expelled. Thus, iron is intimately responsible for the process of breathing, which is how bodily energies are controlled in both Taoist and

Tantric alchemy. In the Tantric system, the Iron or Navel Chakra is visualized as a ten-petaled lotus which is colored the dark gray hue of clouds in an approaching thunderstorm. At the center of the lotus is an inverted red triangle the color of the rising sun. Below the triangle, a dark red ram symbolizes the wild energy of the emotions which is the vehicle of the fire god. To Hindus, the female energy of this chakra is the three-faced, nine-eyed goddess of the life force, who is associated with thunderbolts and the color dark blue. She has four arms and two of her hands make the gestures that dispel fear and grant wishes. In her other hands, she holds fire and a thunderbolt, which stand for the destructive powers of Calcination. The Hindu deity symbolizing the intelligence or state of consciousness at this level is Rudra, a red-colored, four-armed man holding fire and a rosary, symbolizing meditation. His other two hands make the gestures dispelling fear and granting wishes. In other words, the vital energy trapped in this chakra is based in the fiery emotions, which can be harnessed through the willpower and the other mindful activities of Separation.

Working with the Copper of the Caduceus

The coalescing powers of the Earth element are put into play at this level of the caduceus, which represents alchemical Conjunction. The goal is to bring the spiritizing influence of the Air element, separated out in the previous operation, into the body. This marriage of Air and Earth, spirit and soul, is the Marriage of Opposites of alchemy that takes place within the heart of the alchemist. Sometimes the earth is considered the planet of Conjunction, though more often Venus is the planet associated with this step of transformation. The origin of the glyph for this planet is the symbol for the life force used by the Egyptians. Known as the *ankh*, it depicts a circle over a cross, denoting the triumph of spirit over matter. The metal associated with Venus is copper, and its color is green.

The Copper Chakra in Kundalini yoga is known as the Heart Chakra, which is visualized as a lotus with twelve deep-red petals and two triangles inscribed within. One triangle points up and the other points down, forming a

hexagram or Star of David figure that symbolizes the union of Fire and Water. At the center of the hexagram is a smaller, golden triangle, “lustrous as ten million flashes of lightning.” This central triangle points downward and displays the phallic *lingam*, which indicates the Lead Chakra at the base of the spine. The Hindu animal totem associated with the heart is the antelope or gazelle, which stands for the lightness of the spiritual substance at this stage. The intelligence deity is brick-red with three eyes and two arms. His hands form the gestures for granting wishes and having no fear. The energy goddess at the heart level is colored yellow and has three eyes and four arms. Two of her hands make the same gestures as the intelligence deity, but the other two hold a skull and noose. The skull stands for the purified mind of the aspirant, while the noose symbolizes the capturing of the spiritual essences from the previous operations.

The Copper Chakra is associated with the powers of touch and speech, balanced feelings, and ascending mind. The idea expressed here is the creation of the feeling intellect, the union of the female and male aspects of consciousness in a new state of truth-based intuition. In alchemical terms, this is the marriage of the Sun and Moon, the solar and lunar ways of knowing, the coming together of spirit and soul. While there is less self-serving attachment to others, there is greater caring and responsiveness. There arises a giving, optimistic person in place of the previous manipulative one. As the transmutation of Copper continues, the alchemist begins to exercise free will unencumbered by buried emotions, addictions, impulses, and instincts.

Working with the Mercury of the Caduceus

The fifth position on the staff of Hermes, or the Throat Chakra in the *kundalini* system, is located at the junction of the spine and the laryngeal plexus and is related to the power of speech. In Western alchemy, this level is associated with Fermentation and the fifth element, the Quintessence, which was isolated in the foregoing processes. Both the metal and planet connected with this dual stage is Mercury. In psychological terms, the Mercury Chakra is the seat of inspiration, true creativity, and the spoken word. As Mercury is

transmuted, a sense of trust and sublimity arise in the individual, as he or she senses a presence of unlimited sustenance and potential within them. In changing from Mercury into Silver, the impression of this presence becomes even more solidified, and gradually, a powerful resonance with the divine begins.

In the Tantric tradition, the laboratory of alchemy is strictly inside the body, and they believed Fermentation took place when the serpentine power of *kundalini* reached the throat area and activated the thyroid and thymus glands. Called the Gateway to Liberation, the Throat or Mercury Chakra is visualized as a purple lotus with sixteen petals and contains a downward-pointing triangle in which a circle is inscribed, meaning its perfected power is projected to the Below. The animal totem here is a moon-white elephant with six trunks and no collar, which is symbolic of the revived First Matter. The intelligence deity is a two-toned god, half male and half female, that has five faces, three eyes, and nine arms. The androgynous god holds nine items which symbolize the current situation: the trident (three bodies in one), a thunderbolt (awareness of power), fire (rekindling of will and ambition), a bell (reminder to listen), a serpent (temptation of wisdom), a noose (warns of getting caught in pride of wisdom), an axe (to cut out still imperfect aspects of the personality), a sword (discrimination), and an ox-driving stick (goading to next level still needed). In other words, the spiritual alchemist has succeeded in uniting the opposing modes of consciousness and has realized the tremendous power of mind over matter, but there is now the distinct possibility that these godlike powers will cause any remaining traces of ego to resurface. Because of that, the transformation is not complete and further purification is needed.

The white energy goddess of the Mercury Chakra is also five-faced and three-eyed but has only four arms. She is holding a noose, an ox-driving stick, an arrow, and a bow. The noose warns of not being caught by the sound of your own energy vibrations or voice. The ox-driving stick warns that the energy must be pushed yet to higher levels. The arrow implies that the direction of that effort must be toward the Above, and the bow symbolizes that tension or effort is still necessary. At this stage in the alchemical transformation, the Quintessence is energized by the force of Mercury. It is impregnated with the alchemist's Secret Fire, the inspired state of consciousness that attracts and embodies the breath of life from Above. This

is the ethereal Word, the ultimate power of the One Mind over the One Thing.

Working with the Silver of the Caduceus

This position on the caduceus corresponding to Distillation is represented by the Moon, and the corresponding metal is silver or antimony. In Kundalini yoga, Distillation takes place in the area behind the forehead, located between the eyebrows at the level of the pituitary gland. Known in alchemy as the Silver Chakra, it controls bodily functions as well as the various mental states, such as concentration and meditation, that are required in Kundalini yoga. It is visualized as a lotus with two white petals and an inverted moon-white triangle at its center. Inside the triangle the empty *lingam* or root is exposed, indicating that the serpent roused from the Lead or Root Chakra is now fully assimilated. The intelligence at this level is represented by a golden dot (*bindu*) embraced by a silvery quarter moon over the central triangle. It symbolizes the complete transcendence of the duality of male/female consciousness and the direct experience of both mental images and abstract ideas. The energy of the Silver Chakra is represented by a sexless divine person with six faces, three eyes, and six arms. Two hands make the gestures for granting wishes and dispelling fears and the hands hold up a book (knowledge retained), a skull on a staff (the attainment of the caduceus), a rosary (the meditative state is now self-generating), and a drum (warning that the rhythm or vibration of this transformation must be passed on to others).

Psychologically, the transmutation of the Silver Chakra produces a lasting mystical state absolutely purified of instinctual or egotistic forces. Intuition reaches its highest state of perfection, and one begins to move beyond the limitations of space and time. The feeling is one of intense connection to the cosmos. In the last stages of transmutation, a Sublimation of spiritual forces occurs which lays the groundwork for the formation of a Second Body, a body of light, in the next and final position on the caduceus.

Working with the Gold of the Caduceus

The Salt element of the Coagulation process forms in the ball at the top or positive end of the caduceus, where it takes on wings. The ball represents matter raised to its highest incarnation, the transformation of the First Matter at the base of the caduceus into the Philosopher's Stone at its apex. The corresponding "planet" is the Sun and the metal is gold.

In Kundalini yoga, the Gold Chakra is known as the Crown Chakra, which in physical terms is often interpreted as the pineal gland, a pine-cone-shaped appendage at the center of the brain. Esoterically, it is pictured as a thousand-petaled lotus that floats above the head like a halo. This inverted lotus, rooted in the Above, is said to embrace all colors, all senses, all functions, and is all-pervading in power. It is the Gate of Brahma, the escape hatch to the supraluminal realm where the individual emerges completely from the confines of time and space. Duality disappears, and the alchemist is finally one with the universe in which the divine is experienced as a new state of being. One achieves a true understanding of all things on all levels.

With the final transmutation of the metals into gold, the practitioner has perfected the Stone—the permanent reintegration with the purified essence of Self. The complete integration of consciousness and reality, mind and matter, is achieved, and thought becomes action with no intermediaries to interfere. Further support of this cosmic Pattern, or scheme of transformation, comes from the world of chemistry itself. According to the Doctrine of Correspondences, the steps on the caduceus should be mirrored throughout the physical world. The Egyptians believed they had found that independent confirmation in a single experiment that they tried to keep secret for millennia. They had good reason to do so; their Arcanum Experiment openly demonstrates all the Hermetic principles.

[1](#) From Origen, *Contra Celsum* (Rome, 248 C.E.), which was based on a treatise by Celsus on Mithraism published in Rome in 180 C.E.

[2](#) From Diane di Prima, "Paracelsus: An Appreciation," an essay that appeared in *The Alchemical Tradition in the Late Twentieth Century*, Richard Grossinger, ed. (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1983).

[3](#) For a detailed description of these and other experiments, see Nick Kollerstrom, *The Metal-Planet Relationship: A Study of Celestial Influence*

(Gargerville, California: Borderland Sciences, 1993). Studies of metal price fluctuations with respect to planetary events have been published in the *Metal Bulletin*, *Financial Weekly*, and the *Krugerrand Bulletin*.



Chapter 20

THE CHEMISTRY OF MIRACLES

The Arcanum Experiment

The arcanum is a concept that has deep significance in all the Hermetic sciences. It is the Latin word for “secret,” the root for our word “arcane” (meaning esoteric), and is used to denote the major and minor divisions of the tarot deck. The medieval alchemists used the word in the sense of chemicals that were part of the secrets of God or nature, and Paracelsus portrayed the arcana as eternal or archetypal ingredients that have the power of restoring and transmuting the human body. To Egyptian alchemists, the arcana were the psychophysical secret ingredients in their experiments, and the “Arcanum Experiment” was the name applied to the single laboratory experiment that openly demonstrated all the principles of the Emerald Tablet.

The seven chemical ingredients of this impressive experiment date back to Akhenaten’s time and were fairly well known to medieval alchemists. The properties of these compounds symbolized the highest philosophical truths and demonstrated basic chemical principles. As we learned in the previous chapter, the most important of the arcana, the one in which all other reactions took place, was Vitriol. It was distilled from an oily, green substance that forms naturally from the weathering of sulfur-bearing gravel and stinks like rotten eggs. After this Green Vitriol was collected, it was heated and broken down into iron compounds and sulfuric acid. Distilling the solution yields an odorless, thick, yellow liquid known as Oil of Vitriol, which can be distilled even further to obtain pure sulfuric acid. The acid readily dissolves human flesh and is severely corrosive to most metals, although it has no effect on gold. Vitriol shows a tremendous thirst for water. If a flask of it is allowed to stand open, it absorbs water vapor from the air and overflows its container. The sulfuric acid in Vitriol was the agent of transformation in most alchemical experiments, and in modern times, serves the same purpose in

most industrial chemical reactions.

Green Vitriol in its natural state was a powerful disinfectant, but the alchemists also made therapeutic use of the iron compounds produced when it was heated. As far back as 1500 B.C.E. Egyptians smelted iron ore and knew its therapeutic value. They used powdered rust to heal wounds and prepared a tonic from iron sulfate, another by-product of the distillation of Vitriol. The Egyptians also accumulated the white powder from dry lake beds. Chemically known as soda ash (sodium carbonate), the oldest deposits are in the Sinai desert. Another naturally occurring sodium compound mined by the Egyptians was cubic-saltpeter (sodium nitrate). The alchemists referred to both these salts as Natron (from the Arabic word for soda ash), because they suspected that both had a common basis. To the early alchemists, the word Natron stood for the basic principle in all salt formation and the creation of bodies in general.

Liquor Hepatis was the name given to another sulfurous liquid used by the alchemists. It was prepared by distilling a solution of sulfur, lime, and sal ammoniac. They secured lime (calcium oxide) by heating limestone and made sal ammoniac (ammonium chloride) by gently heating animal dung in sealed containers. The distillation for Liquor Hepatis produced a combination of hydrogen sulfide and ammonia gases. Since no solids precipitated, alchemists considered this an ascending reaction only. That was a significant fact to the Egyptians, who associated the dark liquor with the soul. They believed the soul resided in the liver, and the signatory reddish-brown color of Liquor Hepatis convinced them they had isolated the soul's essence. The name comes from *hepar*, the Greek word for liver.

The liquor exuded an unnatural, pungent odor that the alchemists found quite mysterious. They assumed it was due to an ethereal presence concealed in the sulfur and activated by the fertilizing principle in ammonia. To the Egyptians, the odor symbolized a soul or a spiritized presence hidden within the liquid. They solidified that presence by adding wax and fat to Liquor Hepatis and turning it into a thick paste. The emulsion became known as the Balsam of the Alchemists, or the Balsam of the Soul, and the possibility of coagulating an invisible essence into a second body, like a balsam, became a basic tenet of alchemy.

If Liquor Hepatis represented soul, then Pulvis Solaris represented spirit. The "Powder of the Sun" was a mixture of two powders, Black Solaris and

Red Solaris. Black Solaris was made by combining black antimony with sulfur aureum. Black antimony was a common sulfide of antimony, now known as stibnite. The stibnite ore was smelted, ground fine, and used as a powder to purify gold and as a medicine for wounds and abscesses. A crystalline star formation of pure antimony known as the “Star Regulus” fascinated alchemists of the seventeenth century and became an obsession with Isaac Newton, who felt the Elixir might be drawn from it. Pure sulfur aureum, or “golden sulfur,” was made by adding sulfuric acid to a dried mixture of sodium carbonate, sulfur, lime, and antimony. The reaction gave off hydrogen sulfide gas, while the sulfur aureum precipitated to the bottom of the container.

Red Solaris was made by combining sulfur aureum with a compound of mercury known as red mercuric oxide. The Alexandrians made it by heating the quicksilver in a solution of nitric acid. The acid, which medieval alchemists called Aqua Fortis, was made by pouring sulfuric acid over saltpeter. The reaction of quicksilver in nitric acid was impressive. A thick red vapor hovered over the surface and bright red crystals precipitated to the bottom. This striking chemical reaction demonstrated the simultaneous separation of mercury into the Above and the Below. Mercury’s all-encompassing properties were exhibited in other compounds too. If mercury was heated in a long-necked flask, it oxidized into a poisonous white powder (white mercuric oxide) and therapeutic red crystals (red mercuric oxide). Calomel (mercury chloride) was a powerful medicine, unless it was directly exposed to light, in which case it became a deadly poison. When mixed with other metals, liquid mercury tended to unite with them and form hardened amalgams. These and other signatures of mercury convinced alchemists that the fluid metal transcended both the solid and liquid states, earth and heaven, life and death. It symbolized Hermes himself, the guide of the Above and Below.



*The release of the purified soul through the operations of alchemy.
(Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfurt 1617)*

Sulfur aureum showed a strong “love” for either red mercuric oxide or black antimony. As soon as it was mixed with either, they clumped together inseparably. For this reason, alchemists classified Pulvis Solaris as a “bezoar,” which is a hard clump of undigested food or solid ball of hair sometimes found in the intestines. In the Middle Ages, physicians thought the mass protected one from poisons and they actually prescribed it to their patients. Egyptian priests discovered bezoars during the preparation of mummies and believed the hard balls were magical pills formed by the large serpent in man (the intestines). It seems likely the Egyptians also looked for a similar pill, in the small serpent in man (the brain), and might have found it

there in the form of the pineal gland. This gland is imbedded with tiny crystals of dark melanin, and could explain the Egyptian pinecone emblems on headdresses and the origin of objects on top of the caduceus. These two anatomical “stones,” one in the intestines and one in the brain, might be the basis of the alchemist’s preoccupation with the search for the Lesser and the Greater Stones.

In any case, Egyptian alchemists associated the serpent with the red mercuric oxide and referred to Red Solaris as *Pulvis Serpentum*. In the same way that bezoars were formed in the serpentine contours of the intestines, so was gold formed in the bowels of the earth. Gold was a mineral bezoar. This connection between red mercuric oxide and the formation of gold would convince later alchemists that Red Solaris was indeed the powder of projection, which would enable them to transform virtually anything into pure gold.

The early alchemists divided their chemicals into major and minor arcana. The major arcana consisted of four compounds representing the four elements: Vitriol (Fire), Natron (Earth), Liquor Hepatis (Water), and Pulvis Solaris (Air). All but the soul arcana (Liquor Hepatis) consisted of dual ingredients that were easily separable. Vitriol could be broken down into sulfuric acid and iron. Natron appeared as sodium carbonate and sodium nitrate. Pulvis Solaris was made up of the red and black varieties. Thus, the seven actual chemicals comprising the “minor” arcana were: Sulfuric Acid, Iron Oxide, Sodium Carbonate, Sodium Nitrate, Liquor Hepatis, Black Pulvis Solaris, and Red Pulvis Solaris.

Sacred Images of the Tarot

The Hermeticists epitomized the arcana chemicals in tarot cards and attempted to “work” with them in psychological and spiritual terms. The trump cards of the major arcana represented the archetypal elements and the minor arcana cards represented their expression in reality. The word “trump” is derived from the Latin word for the Triumph, a religious procession in which the powers of pagan deities were displayed. By shuffling the cards,

one dispersed these divine elements into the physical world. “The game of cards called the Tarot,” said Gerard Encausse, a nineteenth-century French physician and one of the founders of the Order of Martinists, “is the Bible of Bibles. It is the book of Thoth Hermes Trismegistus, the book of Adam, the book of the primitive Revelation of ancient civilizations.”

It is generally believed that the gypsies brought the tarot from Hindustan or Egypt along with Faro (from “Pharaoh”), which is said to be the world’s oldest game of chance. The original name for the tarot cards was *nabi*, an Arabic word for “wiseman” associated with Idris, Enoch, and Hermes. Further confirmation came from the eighteenth-century French archeologist Antoine Court de Gebelin, who declared that he found evidence linking the tarot images with the *Book of Thoth*, the lost book attributed to the Egyptian scribe Manetho. Gebelin said the book, consisting of “strange drawings on twenty-two stone tablets,” was originally hidden in an ancient pillar or obelisk that had stood between the front paws of the Sphinx. In 1910, the respected Hermetic researcher Arthur Edward Waite issued a revised set of tarot cards that purged them of outside influences and reinstated their esoteric meanings that established the tarot as an “unbound book” of Hermes. Waite believed that the original intent of the images was to guide the initiate through alchemical transformation as well as provide a roadmap for the perfected Astral Body. The cards, he said, were “gates opened on realms of vision beyond occult dreams.”¹

The major arcana of the tarot are made up of twenty-two archetypal images that symbolize the properties of the major arcana chemicals in the Arcanum Experiment, as well as the seven steps in the Emerald Formula. We have already discussed the alchemical meanings of the tarot images in the chapters covering the operations in which they occur. The fifty-six minor arcana tarot cards represent the manifestation and interaction of these archetypal forces of the trumps expressed in the four elements or “suits” of the minor arcana ingredients.

Although the major arcana of tarot consist of twenty-two cards, the first card, known as the Fool and representing the person not aware of alchemical transformation, is numbered zero and is not considered an active part of the deck. The remaining twenty-one active or trump cards are described in many ancient religions as the number of possible forms of God and also represent

the three Magisteriums of alchemy in what are the Seven Steps taken three times to completion. These archetypal “forms” express themselves in the fifty-six minor arcana that are arranged in the four suits (or elements) of manifestation. Esoterically, the number fifty-six represents the steps in time one must take when entering material reality. For example, a Sacred Year, in which the solar and lunar cycles come together in Conjunction, equals fifty-six earth years. Also, most ancient astronomical observatories, such as Stonehenge, were surrounded by fifty-six reference posts. In alchemy, these fifty-six minor arcana are derived from the seven minor chemical arcana. If we divide fifty-six by seven, we return to the source of the minor arcana, which is eight, the number of the higher manifestation of matter that the alchemists called the Stone. If we divide twenty-one by seven, we return to the source of the major arcana, which is the number three, the Holy Trinity of heavenly forces that the alchemists called Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt. The total number of tarot cards (seventy-eight) represents the total dispersion of the archetypal forces in the physical universe and is the sum of the numbers of all the signs of the zodiac ($1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 + 10 + 11 + 12$).

Our modern fifty-two-card deck of playing cards evolved directly from this seventy-eight-card tarot deck. The number zero or the Fool card is still present as the extra Joker card, but all the rest of the tarot trump cards were removed by Christian authorities in the fifteenth century. The established churches recognized the archetypal power of the tarot images to awaken spiritual forces in people working outside the church and saw the trump cards as a threat to their control. They admitted the pictures were part of a spiritual process but insisted they represented “the rungs of a ladder leading to the depths of hell” and not the realm Above as promised by Hermes. In 1378, the tarot was banned in Germany; in 1381, in France; and in 1441, in Italy. The only way the cards were allowed was without the trump cards, which were at the very heart of the tarot. As a result, we must now designate one suit of the remaining minor arcana as trump if we want to play some of the older card games.

Thus, the tarot suit of Staffs, symbolizing the Fire of purification and the process of Calcination, became our suit of Clubs, which is really a triform symbol of heavenly Fire. The tarot’s Cups or Grails cards, symbolizing the Water of the emotions and the process of Dissolution, became our suit of Hearts. The tarot’s Swords, symbolizing the Air of the intellect and the

process of Separation, became our Spades, which is derived from *espada*, the Spanish word for sword. That is why our Ace of Spades stands for death, because the tarot interpretation is that it is the Sword of God hanging over our heads. The tarot's Coins or Disks, sometimes also shown as Pentacles or Pomegranates, symbolized the earthly Conjunction of our innermost desires and became our suit of Diamonds. These four suits comprise the first four operations of alchemy as put down in the Emerald Tablet and make up what the ancients called the Lesser Mysteries or Minor Arcana (Lesser Secrets). The twenty-one active trump cards that comprised the Major Arcana (Greater Secrets) stood for the last three operations of alchemy (Fermentation, Distillation, and Coagulation) that are the Greater Mysteries. But like the ancient Egyptian priests of Amen, the Christian priests decreed that the common people could not know the Greater Secrets and that they could enter the presence of God only through serving under the yoke of the church. In another demonstration of their jealous control of the human spirit, the churchmen also eliminated the innocuous Knight cards from the tarot. Originally, each of the four suits in the minor arcana contained a Knight to serve in the court also. Today, however, our emasculated royal court consists only of the King, Queen, and their Jack or attendant. Some scholars believe the Knights were removed from the tarot because the church was jealous of the rising sway that the Knights Templar had among the people (see chapter 23, "Alchemy of the Millennium"). The respected religious order was suspected of spreading Hermetic doctrines, and the church eventually had all its members arrested. By 1450, the established religious authorities had deliberately removed all the archetypal power from the tarot and eliminated any group that might have tried to restore it.

Chemistry of the Emerald Tablet

Although the chemical arcana were associated with the tarot for some time, no one in modern times connected them to the Emerald Tablet, until an obscure German alchemist worked it out in the mid-nineteenth century. Dr. Gottlieb Latz was a physician and practicing alchemist who lived near Bonn

in central Germany. He spent much of his life searching for the true medicine of the arcanum, laboriously translating old Greek and Latin manuscripts, corresponding with other alchemists throughout Europe, and tracking down clues to this fundamental secret of nature. His motivation was simple: he desperately wanted to help his suffering patients. “My professors taught me that the better the diagnosis, the better the cure,” he wrote in 1868, “but the perverse falsehood of this saying lies right before our eyes! As doctors, we are very capable in our diagnostic talents, but our ability to cure lags far behind. We know how to recognize malignant tumors, pneumonia, syphilis, meningitis, pox, cholera, arthritis, angina—the list goes on and on. But all we can do is watch as our patients suffer! Medicine used to believe that any disease was curable. That was because, thousands of years ago, physicians had knowledge of alchemy.”²

Dr. Latz was determined to singlehandedly recover that lost knowledge. Despite a flourishing medical practice that required him to leave his laboratory and travel on foot or horseback in all kinds of weather to his sick or wounded patients, he found the time to translate scores of ancient documents and reproduce the experiments of the alchemists. “I did not see how it would be possible,” he admitted, “but gradually there awakened in me a greater dimension that allowed me to handle the workload.”

Latz’s most important discovery was that the Emerald Tablet described the action of seven chemical arcana known to the ancients and contained instructions on how to combine these chemicals in the Arcanum Experiment. Ideally, such an experiment should succeed on many levels, not only corroborating the deepest philosophical and psychological principles, but also providing concrete evidence of their veracity. The Arcanum Experiment should expose the hidden principles connecting heaven and earth, offering a framework in which to explain both microcosmic and macrocosmic events, and demonstrating the basic forces and evolution of the universe.

According to Dr. Latz’s research, the Orientation Rubric (“That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above corresponds to that which is Below”) introduces the first two compounds used in the Arcanum Experiment. His research had discovered that the Alexandrian alchemists who translated the original Emerald Tablet were divided into three factions, all of whom had to agree before a translated

version of the tablet could be released. The Egyptian alchemists saw chemical phenomena as an interplay of liquids and solids driven by the “temperature of transformation” that released gases. Based on the periodic flooding of the Nile, which replenished the fertile, black delta soil, they believed that Water was the primary element and Earth the secondary. The Jewish alchemists agreed that the first element in the universe must be Water and the second must be Earth, but based their decision on creation as described in Genesis. The Greeks were also in agreement but based their decision on the so-called Water Transformation Experiment. In this empirical demonstration, standing water evaporates and leaves behind mineral deposits, therefore Water contains Earth and preceded it.

To verify their interpretations chemically, they performed the first part of the Arcanum Experiment. Vitriol was the primary ingredient assigned to Water, and Natron was the secondary element of Earth. When the two chemicals were mixed together, Natron settled to the bottom and a slight steaming occurred. The white Natron then slowly dispersed throughout the acid so that what was of the Below became like that which was of the Above and vice versa, thereby confirming this important precept of the Emerald Tablet. In the microcosmic viewpoint of the experiment, Vitriol was the Above and Natron was the Below, and by their mixture, they served to bring the wonders of this part of the experiment into existence. On a macrocosmic scale, they represented the archetypal forces of Water and Earth. On that level, they served to bring the wonders of the whole universe into existence. The final Vitriol-Natron solution was known as the Occult Water and corresponded to the primordial waters of creation.

The next part of the tablet presented an elaboration of the image of the primordial Occult Water: “And just as all things originate from One Thing, through the meditation of One Mind, so do all created things originate from this One Thing through transformation.” To the Egyptians, the One Thing was the Nile River, upon which they based both their religion and their everyday lives. For the Greeks, the One Thing was the *Prima Materia*, the First Matter from which all things evolved or “transformed.” To the Jewish alchemists, it represented the primal forces gathered by God at the beginning of Genesis. “The meditation of One Mind” described the Greek *Logos*, which was the thoughts of Thoth to the Egyptians and the creative Word of God in Judaism.

Based on these philosophical agreements, the third rubric of the Emerald Tablet might be paraphrased in terms of the Arcanum Experiment as: “Vitriol is the active Sun or father of the Arcanum; Natron is the passive Moon or its mother. Vitriol is formed by the Wind weathering rocks, and Natron is mined from the Earth. The active nature of Vitriol is the source of all changes in the experiment, the potential of Natron is achieved when it is transformed into an inert Salt.”

The next, fourth rubric of the tablet moves us to a new level, telling us to “Separate the Earth from Fire, the Subtle from the Gross, gently and with great Ingenuity.” It describes the mixing of the final pair of arcana, Liquor Hepatis and Pulvis Solaris. Since these are not natural compounds, it is necessary to prepare them in a laboratory using heat. But the Alexandrian alchemists were in disagreement as to which of the four elements made up these two remaining compounds. In keeping with the agreed ordering of elements from the first rubric, they believed there must be a superior element with a Water component and an inferior element with an Earth component. Obviously, Liquor Hepatis contained the Water element and Pulvis Solaris contained the Earth element. According to Dr. Latz, it took many years before the Egyptian, Jewish, and Greek factions could agree on the representation of Fire and Air—the active, masculine elements. They finally concurred that the spiritized Liquor Hepatis contained the elements Water and Air, and the reactive Pulvis Solaris contained the elements Earth and Fire.

The Alexandrian alchemists saw in the fourth rubric a formula for what happens when the Pulvis Solaris is added to the Liquor Hepatis. The powder sinks to the bottom and starts bubbling and releasing a warm, red steam. The bubbling action causes the powder to repeatedly rise to the top of the liquor and then sink back down again. After the reaction is over, a red precipitate accumulates on the bottom. This is similar to the creation of the Red Solaris, which was formed by heating mercury in nitric acid. In that reaction, red steam was formed, and red crystals fell to the bottom. Another parallel was the creation of Liquor Hepatis, which was produced by repeated distillations of a dark, sulfurous solution. In all reactions involving Pulvis Solaris and Liquor Hepatis, what ascended was a reddish gas, and what descended were red precipitates. So this part of the fourth rubric describes how each of the second pair of compounds is reduced to its basic components in an ascending

and descending reaction. The admonition to “separate the Earth from Fire” calls for the Earth element to be separated from the Fire element in Pulvis Solaris. “Separate the Subtle from the Gross” calls for the Air or subtle element to be separated from the Water or gross element in Liquor Hepatis.

The second part of the fourth rubric describes the movements in the vessel during the experiment. “It rises from Earth to Heaven, and descends again to Earth, thereby combining within itself the powers of both the Above and the Below.” This passage not only describes what happens when the Liquor Hepatis and Pulvis Solaris are mixed together, but also what happens when the mixture is added to the Vitriol and Natron solution (the Occult Water) prepared earlier. As the mixture of the four arcana is heated, the chemicals begin to react. A white cloud of ammonia forms on the surface of the acid and any solids at the bottom rise to the top and fall back down again. Further heating causes a red vapor to form, as the precipitated matter releases gases when it reaches the surface. This circulatory pattern continues until the reaction plays out. The constituents of the four major arcana have broken down into the seven minor arcana and recombined to make totally different compounds. By their exchange of elements, Pulvis Solaris and Liquor Hepatis each receive the powers of all four elements in both the Above and Below when they are mixed in a solution of Vitriol and Natron.

The fifth rubric brings all the reactions together as the single arcanum, the united chemicals of the arcana. You have “obtained the Glory of the whole universe” by understanding the operation of the four elements on all levels: in the experiment, in our own souls, in nature, in the universe. “All Obscurity will be clear to you” points beyond the four elements to knowledge of the arcanum, your perfected soul, and the Quintessence that becomes your Stone. But a chemical compound corresponding to this Quintessence must be produced in the Arcanum Experiment for this multileveled allegory to be complete. After the final reaction dies down, the only thing that remains is a weak solution of sulfuric acid and a variety of sodium compounds. The alchemists believed that the Quintessence was one of the these sodium compounds, a “Second Body” of Natron formed during the experiment. This fifth essence was beyond the four elements and exhibited a durability and permanence the other elements lacked. To the alchemists, the inert Salts at the bottom of the vessel at the end of the Arcanum Experiment represented a resurrected and incorruptible body. This inert Salt is the glorified body of a

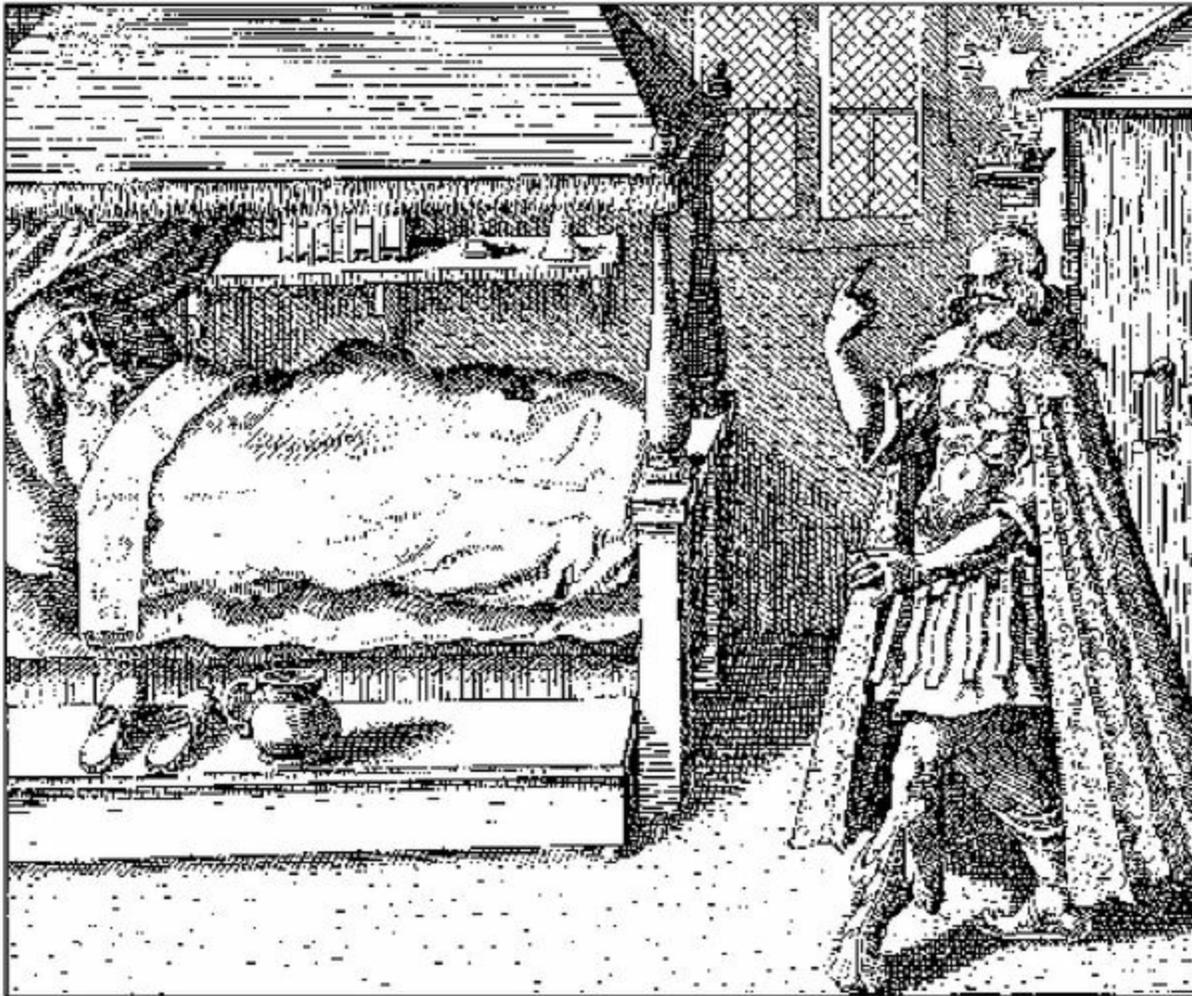
perfected soul, the astral body which will enable us to be at home both in heaven and on earth. This is the “greatest Force of all powers, because it conquers every Subtle Thing and penetrates every Solid Thing.”

The sixth rubric informs us: “In this way was the Universe created; from this comes many wondrous Transformations, because this is the Pattern.” This passage refers back to the Orientation Rubric, which describes the primal separation of the Above and the Below, as well as the separation of compounds in the Arcanum Experiment. As all things originate from One Thing through adaptation, so do the wonders of the experiment proceed from the mixing of Vitriol and Natron, which created the primordial Occult Water. “This is the Pattern” refers specifically to the Arcanum Experiment we have just completed.

In the seventh rubric, we are told that we now have “all three parts of the wisdom of the Whole Universe” and should completely understand the “Operation of the Sun.” The Operation of the Sun is the spiritual unfolding of the universe. It reveals itself in the maturing of all metals into gold and also in the perfection of the hu-man soul. The goal of alchemy is to discover the Arcanum, the single substance that will speed up this process and reveal the Quintessence of Man—his incorruptible, immortal, golden body. To the alchemist, everything in the universe is part of the divine art of making gold. By the conclusion of the experiment, we have manifested the complete trinity of hidden forces, which Dr. Latz would have called Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt. The Operation of the Sun is the operation of the life force itself, and it is exactly what this kind-hearted physician was seeking to understand. In terms of the caduceus, the Arcanum is the serpentine Vitriol of the human body, hissing and coiling about itself in the retort of the sacrum. This liquid fire is an apt symbol for the power of Fire in the body, and fits the feelings described by devotees of *kundalini*, the Serpent Power. What Dr. Latz had discovered was not a chemical panacea but the natural life force within all of us that can be roused and directed by Hermetic discipline to cure any disease and impart lasting rejuvenation. Wrote Dr. Latz in his monumental work *Die Alchemie* (Bonn, 1869):

Finally, with the aid of the Emerald Tablet, I found what I was looking for. The alchemists tried to conceal their knowledge and did everything they could to entice people down the wrong path. In actual fact, from what they held back, you can follow the thing to its true source. You will discover

things that you would never have guessed to be true: that the medical profession is descended from a secret tradition, that we have much in common with the alchemists, that only through the study of alchemy will we find enlightenment. The Emerald Tablet, that ancient green stone said to be part of Creation itself, is really the only Stone of the Philosophers. It stems from a time when the whole world attempted to agree on one philosophy, and its solidified wisdom contains the Secrets of the Ages. We must start back on the road whence we came and rediscover the lost knowledge of our Alexandrian forefathers. We must again attempt to build one world with one true philosophy. Alchemy is that one philosophy of Nature and God that can unify all our sciences, religions, and politics. Let us begin now with the act of healing. The time has come to acknowledge the alchemical foundations of medicine and to accept the caduceus for what it is—the Staff of Hermes!



A sleeping alchemist projects his astral body. (Daniel Mylius, Philosophia

Reformata, Frankfurt 1622)

1 *The Alchemical Tarot* by Rosemary Ellen Guiley (London and San Francisco: HarperCollins Thorsons, 1995) is the best introduction to this topic. Her book comes with a remarkably evocative tarot deck drawn by esoteric artist Robert Place. Other notable tarot decks are the *Rider-Waite Tarot* and the *Golden Dawn Tarot*, both published by U.S. Games, Stamford, Connecticut.

2 From Dennis William Hauck, *Secret of the Emerald Tablet: A Translation of Sections of Die Alchemie by Dr. Gottlieb Latz* (Edmonds, Washington; Holmes Publishing, 1993).of *Die Alchemie by Dr. Gottlieb Latz* (Edmonds, Washington; Holmes Publishing, 1993).



Chapter 21

USING THE FORMULA IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The Personal Alchemy Quiz

How can you apply the Emerald Formula to your own life? How can you find out where you stand in your personal alchemy? What operations have you yet to begin? One way to answer these questions is to look through the alchemical drawings in this book and in the others listed in the bibliography to see which images resonate with you at the deepest level. A few of these alchemical mandalas contain representations of all Seven Stages within one drawing, in which case you have to find what part of the drawing interests you the most. The archetypal symbols used by the alchemists transcend language and explanation, and you literally have to feel your way through them. Those figures that seem to have the most effect on you usually represent your stage of personal alchemy.

However, alchemical symbols are universal and can be found everywhere in our society. The archetypal power of alchemical concepts is why they are incorporated in some of the world's greatest literature. References in the works of William Shakespeare alone have filled whole volumes, and some evidence suggests the Emerald Tablet was the inspiration for the Grail legends (see chapter 23, "Alchemy of the Millennium"). Certainly the tablet's perspective can be found in modern film epics like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Neverending Story*, and the *Star Wars* series. In fact, in the early development of the Yoda character in *Star Wars*, he was pictured as a Hermes figure, complete with Egyptian-style headgear. The paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, Vincent van Gogh, Salvadore Dali, William Blake, and Odilon Redon are all rich in alchemical symbolism, and the work of modern artists such as De Es Schwertberger, Ernst Fuchs, Wilfried Satty, Johfra Bosschart, Hanna Kay, Ingo Swann, Julia Turchuk, Michael Adams, Robert Place, and numerous others contain startling visual references to the stages of

alchemy.¹

Many advertisers are savvy to the power of alchemical imagery and make use of it to implant subtle associations in our subconscious minds. For instance, a recent McDonald's television commercial shows a tiny, empty, deep-red McDonald's restaurant splashed in golden accents with a metallic yellow disk of the sun a thousand times larger rising directly behind it. Akhenaten himself could not have dreamed of a more intriguing image of the Operation of the Sun. But just how exalted an image of a hamburger chain do advertising executives want to project? Are the Golden Arches really the Two Pillars of Hermes? What next—a free copy of the Emerald Tablet with every Happy Meal?

Besides working with images, another way to try to discover where you are along the alchemical path is the use of psychological testing. Such tests are very popular for measuring IQ, job satisfaction, stress level, and the dynamics of relationships, but no test has yet been developed that attempts to measure spiritual enlightenment. Were it not for the very distinct steps of spiritual growth delineated in the Emerald Tablet, such a test would not even be feasible, but in group sessions with people who are undergoing transformation, certain common parameters seem to stand out. The following quiz has been developed from these sessions and is offered as a tentative guide in determining your own inner alchemy. There is no true litmus test for the metals within us, and no test can be perfectly accurate measuring all the complicated parameters of transformation. But as long as you are consistently honest in answering these questions, the Personal Alchemy Quiz can be used repeatedly to provide at least some indication about how your temperament is changing.

On a piece of paper, number down to twenty-one. Read each of the following statements and reflect on it for a few seconds. Then grade the statement on a scale of 0-5 as it applies to you. Enter 0 if the statement is Never True about you; 1 if it is Rarely True; 2 if it is Sometimes True; 3 if it is Often True; 4 if it is Usually True; and 5 if it is Always True. Try to be as objective as possible in your responses.

1. If someone cuts me off or drives too slow while I'm driving, I curse at them or try to get even.
2. The harder I try to accomplish something, the more obstacles

get in my way.

3. During my free time, I have a hard time finding something to do.

4. When I first meet people, I judge them by how good-looking or well-dressed they are.

5. My dreams are about things that happened to me during the day.

6. While people are talking to me, I think about what my response will be or how to change the subject to something that interests me.

7. I have a hard time throwing stuff away and put up with a lot of clutter.

8. I like to watch the home shopping networks or prefer that sales staff assist me when I go shopping for something.

9. I enjoy arguing with other people about politics, race, or religion.

10. I can't help getting my feelings hurt when people tease me or make insensitive comments.

11. I flirt with no intention of getting involved or flip through magazines looking for pictures of people that turn me on.

12. When I'm depressed, I like to be alone and resent it when people try to cheer me up with parties or going out.

13. I have no problem expressing myself in front of strangers or large groups of people.

14. I keep a journal of inspirational thoughts or carry a list of personal guidelines in my purse or wallet.

15. I spend my free time meditating or just sitting in the dark listening to music.

16. I am very good in an emergency but fall apart afterwards.

17. I get great joy from just being home alone and organizing my room.

18. I can get so involved in a book or movie that I unintentionally ignore people when they talk to me.

19. If I really want something but don't try too hard to get it, things have a way of just falling into place.

20. I feel there is a guiding presence inside me, though I don't like to talk about it because it cheapens it.

21. I experience strange or distorted bodily sensations when I am falling off to sleep or waking up.

The scoring of the Personal Alchemy Quiz is explained in end note number two at the back of this chapter. In interpreting your score, remember that no test of this kind can be infallible and the operations of alchemy continue throughout our lives in a rising spiral of transformation. The results here are intended only as a general guide to what actions would be beneficial at this moment in your life.²

If you scored 0-7 points, you are likely still in the Calcination phase of your personal alchemy and need to take definitive steps toward breaking free of your materialistic viewpoint. Try to find the time to attend lectures by spiritual leaders, read their books, or begin a private program of meditation. If you scored 8-15 points, you are in Dissolution and should make a concerted effort to recognize the spiritual influences in your life. These forces are surfacing, and you should prepare yourself. Scores of 16-22 points indicate you have finally entered the Separation phase and should be taking an honest look at yourself and the things you want to count on later in your life. If you scored 23-30 points, you have reached a Conjunction of the opposing forces within your personality. At this time of renewed confidence, you should seek those activities that reinforce your peace of mind. It is an excellent time for a nature retreat or deep meditative session.

Scores in the lower range of 31-40 mean you are beginning Fermentation and could be experiencing both mental and physical depression. Be patient and try to feel the full intensity of your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, since they are offering you a true escape from the mundane world in which you feel yourself trapped. Higher scores in this range indicate that you are undergoing a period of true inspiration during which you should try to keep as grounded as possible. Keep a journal of your thoughts and dreams no matter how strange or irrelevant they may seem. If you scored in the range of 41-48 points, you could be experiencing Distillation. This is a true break with the world, so it is important to stay oriented during this disconcerting process by identifying a “presence” within you that is always centered. Scores of 49-55 points suggest that you are in a stage of Coagulation in which worldly concerns are receding and hidden spiritual forces are taking on new reality. Respect the new freedom and perspective you have achieved at

this plateau, for in all likelihood, a new round in your personal alchemy is about to begin.

The Spiral of Becoming

The processes that are indicated in the Personal Alchemy Quiz should be familiar to all of us. Each of us experiences the same alchemy of the Emerald Formula many times over in our lives. When we are young and just beginning to create ourselves and form the parameters of our personalities, we leave the ouroboric paradise of early childhood and enter the world to begin transformation. Personal alchemy is a series of progressive interior experiences imprinted in the overall Pattern of our life span.

At the early stages of our alchemy, the spiral of becoming is very tightly wound and the changes seem to take place almost on a daily basis. By the time we are seven years old, most of us have left the wholeness of innocence and are witnessing the birth of ego that disrupts our former harmony with the world and automatically engenders the opposing forces of Calcination. By fourteen years, we are starting to be overcome by the powers of instinct and the subconscious in a Dissolution of self that can be devastating. By age twenty-one, we have already experienced the Separation in our souls that preserves our former gold in the wounds of our daily lives. We become achievers and set aside efforts to preserve childhood purity to concentrate on worldly affairs.

For many of us, this egocentric phase ends sometime between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty-five, when we come across some philosophy or a real person that embodies the traits we have given up for lost within ourselves. This creation of one perfect being from the opposites within is the Conjunction that gives our life new meaning and focus. But many people remain at the point where they found balance in their lives and think that that was all they were looking for. They lose the spiritual drive that can take them to the edge again, to the next step in their transformation. How many souls are trapped in repeated reincarnations, either while living or after death, looking for that next step?

To escape the wheel of rebirth, whether in society or in the cosmos, we need to accept the absolute reality of something more to our existence and commit to it while still living. That is the Fermentation of our souls. This seems to hit a lot of people around the age of forty or later. Suddenly, we are struck by the inadequacy of our spiritual training and the futility of material pursuits and all we want to do is find spiritual direction. This is a dangerous period in which many people give up their families and livelihoods to follow the next guru that happens along.

Few are successful at true Fermentation, but when it occurs we automatically know it is genuine and completely beyond anything we could have previously imagined. While it may still take lifetimes for some of us to get it right in the maturing purification called Distillation, at least the seed has been planted in our souls that will one day ripen and bloom in the splendor of the final Coagulation. Hopefully, the final Coagulation has occurred in time for us to go back out into the world and do some good.



Alchemists tear up their books to give full attention to the soul and experience life directly. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfurt 1617)

The Emerald Formula at Work

Once we get an idea of where we are at in our personal alchemy, how do we go about applying the exalted principles of the Emerald Tablet in everyday life in this fast-paced world? The miracle of the Emerald Formula is that it works on many different levels of reality at once, not only in the soul

and spirit, but in the body and physical reality too. Anywhere there is creation and transformation taking place, the Emerald Formula applies. The same processes that are at work in such creative acts as writing a novel, composing music, finishing a business project, or writing computer programs are similar to the processes at work in the creation of the whole universe. This can be appreciated most readily by examining the relationship between a playwright and his play.

At the beginning, the dramatist has only the glimmer of an idea, which is the hidden soul of the work, from which to draw his inspiration. Consequently, as he progresses in assembling and writing the material, irrelevant subject matter creeps into the story line, and the play seems to take on a mind of its own—an ego. The black phase of alchemy begins, and the heart of the play is crucified by outside forces. The dramatist loses sight of his original inspiration and gradually loses his creative edge, possibly developing writer's block. If the work is given up at this stage, all is lost. The process of Calcination must take place to bring the work back into proper perspective, for it is only the dramatist's personal fire and will to do away with extraneous material that will redeem the play. That is, only the purest elements of the work must remain if the play is to be true to its original glimmer of inspiration.

In the Dissolution process, those previously insoluble stumbling blocks crumble as all aspects of the play are equalized in a single, fluid overview. The dramatist is disentangled from his work, which allows a free-flowing attitude to emerge. His unconscious mind begins to generate new perspectives and combinations of the material in the form of dreams, new characters, and imaginary scenarios. During the Separation phase, the playwright uses the conscious processes of discrimination and evaluation to divide the relevant from the peripheral material in his play. He keeps only the material that supports and expands on his original inspiration.

The ensuing mental Conjunction is the fixing process, and the dramatist's ideas are finally set. With new confidence and poise, he begins the true writing phase in which he endows his characters with life, personalities, and bodily features. At this stage, the writer has achieved a new level—just beyond himself—that requires outside inspiration to succeed. The Fermentation phase begins with the killing or deletion of any remaining unadaptable material. In digestive Putrefaction, the events, situations, and

characterizations must be plowed back into the blackness of the personal and collective unconscious. After this return to the universal womb, the play's essence is brought to life, and only the most vital and nonpersonal aspects of the play survive.

To capture the play's revealed essence and embody it in a viable work, the playwright must further remove the "Earth from Fire" and ignore all concerns about deadlines, money, contracts, and publicity. The play must be allowed time and fertile ground in which to attract the necessary powers from Above. If successful, the play lives on paper in the animated colors of the Peacock's proudly unfurled tail. Next is a Distillation of the preceding steps in repeated editing and rewriting. This stage represents the ventilating and reassessment of concepts that allows a higher perspective over the whole work. When the purified and spiritualized elements finally come together in the final Coagulation, the play emerges redeemed and intact. All the contrary characters and all the necessary yet opposing forces within the play have formed an imposing and deeply compelling harmony that appeals to audiences on many different levels.

Alchemy of Love and Relationships

The same alchemical processes that perfect the playwright's work are at work in the maturation of the individual person. They are also present in relationships between individuals, and consequently, those inherent alchemical forces can be harnessed to transform failing relationships into living, productive pairings in which both partners can grow into a unified whole that is bigger than the sum of its parts. The opposing essences in relationships are what drives the alchemy between people, for often the mental or physical Conjunction we are seeking with friends and lovers is an unconscious effort to complement our deepest essence, to find our soul mate. Loved ones are mirrors of our own souls, reflecting back qualities which are within us that we need to reclaim as our own.

Unfortunately, maintaining the fires in a relationship is a full-time job. Through intimacy, we gradually realize that the other is not the perfect

embodiment of our soul mate that we had expected. Feelings get polluted, thoughts turn poisonous, and the relationship becomes toxic. At this point, there is only one way the relationship can be saved and still be alive. That is through the permanent purification and fundamental transformation that takes place in the Emerald Formula. Starting with Calcination, the elements of ego from which the poisons are being released must be exposed and burned away in the fires of awareness. These poisons are made up of past judgments, unforgiven mistakes, pointless criticism, and endless complaining. The typical toxic reaction to these poisons is the formation of habits that tend to numb feelings and distance the partners from one another. Preoccupation with outside activities, partying with friends, drinking and drugs, consuming hobbies, and television are all possible escapes from facing the toxicity and removing it from the relationship. These poisons build up in any relationship just like they do within one's personality, and if they are not burnt away, they pollute the entire environment.

Dissolution is a way to remove pollutants by assimilation. Tensions, contagious moods, and hurt feelings must be defused and dissolved before they take hold, and the little dramas and trumped-up crises must be drowned in the waters of genuine caring before they take shape. Hardest of all to dissolve are patterns of emotional, sexual, and physical abuse that arise in many relationships. The effects of passive-aggressive tactics such as the infamous "silent treatment" are just as difficult to remove, since these poisons eat deep into a partner's dignity and self-esteem. Sometimes, in order to save the relationship at all costs, total Dissolution takes place as the partners completely surrender individual identities and take on the traits of the other. In alchemical terms, such a dissolved relationship is stillborn and cannot be transformed. That is why it is so important to see the toxins as existing in the relationship and not in individuals. The goal is to transform the relationship, *not* each other, for the opposing essences we share with one another is what fuels the entire relationship. Once these purified essences surface and are divided and identified in alchemical Separation, they can be brought together in a new Conjunction. For instance, one partner may have qualities of imagination and inventiveness lacking in the other, while the other may have practical knowledge and a down-to-earth emotional base that grounds them both. The partners realize that by validating the other they support themselves. Then, in Conjunction, the best of each partner is saved and united

into a shared quintessence that offers new hope and promise for the couple.

However, no matter how optimistic the Conjunction, traces of past pain and ego invariably find their way in the newly formed and reoriented relationship. Putrefaction is a natural process that develops in the course of even the best relationships as each partner compromises, surrendering aspects of his or her own personality for the survival of the couple. The black mood that sometimes results can cause an extinction of all interest in the relationship, and the partners must act to keep things alive at this stage or slip back into a toxic relationship. At this point, Fermentation is the only way of saving the pairing. Whether it be the help of friends, a marriage counselor, or shared meditation sessions, the individual essences in the relationship must be exposed to outside or transcendental forces to introduce something completely new, genuine, or sacred into the relationship. By moving the focal point of the relationship from the mundane concerns of everyday survival to some higher ground, the relationship itself is raised. Sometimes if just one partner holds onto something from the Above, he or she can lift both partners out of the quagmire of a toxic relationship. Gradually, our partnership blooms and we learn to trust what we see in the mirror of the relationship and act on it. Thereby, we look within ourselves, not only to our partners, for growth and deep transmutation.

In the ensuing Distillation phase, both partners learn how to look past their own and the other's personality flaws to the beauty and innocence of individual essences. They have finally moved past blame, shame, and games and refined their relationship to the point where they are able to share hurt feelings without anger by reopening their hearts in mutual trust. In marriages, sexuality has reached a higher level in a true mixing of masculine and feminine essences that can lead to Tantric enlightenment. In Coagulation, the opposing forces in the relationship are balanced and solidified into a living third thing—the shared Stone—from which each partner takes his due and grows stronger in its reflected energy. Every relationship seeks to build this third presence or Stone, which allows each partner to keep his or her own essences intact while sharing in the traits and energies of the other. Psychologically, the Stone is the solid footing experienced in a successful relationship or marriage resulting in new confidence, creativity, and peace of mind for both partners. Creation of the Stone in a relationship is the only way the toxins and pollutants of everyday life can be eliminated on an ongoing

basis to prevent them from building up, to keep them from stifling and diverting the vital energies that keep any relationship alive.

1 The development of the Yoda character can be followed in Deborah Call, ed., *The Art of Star Wars* (New York: Ballantine Del Ray, 1994). For descriptions of alchemical art see: Laurinda Dixon, *Alchemical Imagery in Bosch's Garden of Delights* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research, 1980); *Heavy Light: The Art of De Es* (New York: Morpheus Int'l, 1977) and *Sacred Mirrors: The Visionary Art of Alex Grey* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions Int'l, 1990); Nevill Drury, *Inner Visions* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); Fred Get-tings, *Secret Symbolism in Occult Art* (New York: Harmony Books, 1987); and Maurice Tuchman, ed., *The Spiritual in Abstract Painting: 1890-1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).

2 To score the Personal Alchemy Quiz, add up the numbers entered for questions 1-10, then add up the numbers entered for questions 11-21. Subtract the total for questions 1-10 from the total for questions 11-21; that is your score. Any negative scores should be interpreted as a score of zero. An interactive, self-scoring version of the Alchemy Quiz is available at the author's website, www.AlchemyLab.com.



Part 3

WHAT THE TABLET SAYS ABOUT OUR FUTURE



Chapter 22

THE HERMES FACTOR

Hermetic Consciousness

Hermetic consciousness is an altered state of mind that is divorced from the concerns and prejudices of everyday life. From the perspective of the man-woman-god Hermes, all the trials and tribulations of human existence do not amount to much unless they contribute to our transformation from his cosmic viewpoint, and if we do not watch out, Hermes is liable to trick us into joining him on the Other Side so we can see exactly what it is we are missing. Though Hermes is always right in the thick of human activity, he never loses his connection with the powers Above. In psychological terms, he is the Psychopomp, who guides us in our journey after death; he is also the Oneicopomp, who oversees our dreams. Hermes can always be found at crossroads and gateways, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between the Above and the Below.

Though we might know where to find him, it is still very hard to pin down this ever-changing god. The Egyptians connected him with both the god Thoth and the man Hermes Trismegistus; to the Greeks, he was the messenger god Hermes; to the Norse, he was both Hermod the Messenger and Loki the Cheater; to the Germans, he was the god of the dead and war, Wodan; to the Romans, he became Mercury, the god of commerce; the Hindus named him Krishna, the shape-shifter; and to Native Americans he is the Coyote Trickster. He is always the Grand Mediator, and we meet him during the transitional periods—the Wednesdays—of our lives. In fact, our Hump Day is really “Wodan’s Day,” named after the German Hermes, and in France, the middle day of the week is *Mercredi*, after the Roman Mercury.

Originally a domesticated god watching over fences, pastures, flocks, and houses, Hermes evolved into a god of travelers, merchants, orators, sportsmen, prostitutes, and gamblers. First pictured as a phallic figure

guarding boundaries, he evolved into a powerful bearded athlete and finally became a much younger athlete, wearing winged golden sandals and carrying the caduceus. Hermes is sometimes depicted as either a sheep or a goat and is known to consort with both saints and sinners. His sexual vigor is unsurpassed and so permeable that his invisible presence can be felt accumulated in isolated caves, holes, and cairns. Perhaps the only constant in all these descriptions is that he is always turns out to be a bearer of good fortune.

Although he is one of the twelve major deities on Mount Olympus, it is hard to think of Hermes as a god, and even the Greek myth *Hymn to Hermes* admits he was born a delinquent. Son of Zeus and brother to Apollo, he was born in the middle of the night in a deep cavern and immediately crept out of his cradle and stole fifty cows from his brother's flock. Then he magically put their hooves on backwards so their tracks would lead away from their hiding place deep in a nearby cave. Apollo immediately suspected his one-day-old brother, who swore that he was just an innocent baby who knew nothing of the crime, but the frustrated Apollo yanked Hermes up from his cradle. The child promptly urinated in his brother's arms and ran off to Zeus, to whom he vigorously protested his innocence. The all-knowing Zeus was highly amused but ordered Hermes to return the cattle to Apollo. Hermes, of course, resorted to even more trickery, although Apollo ended up giving his younger brother the whole herd when he heard his baby brother playing a turtle-shell lyre he had invented. The sound of the musical instrument enthralled Apollo, and afterwards the two became good friends. Because of his fleetness and fearless ability to go anywhere, Hermes was appointed the Messenger of the Gods, and that is the role he is known for today.

Unlike his brother Apollo, who symbolizes detached, masculine consciousness with its straight-laced scientific emphasis on clarity and proving things, Hermes knows how to communicate what he is feeling by waiting for the right moment to speak and choosing just the right words. According to mythologist Ginette Paris in her book *Pagan Grace*, Hermes' inspiration arises at the crossroads of the created and the uncreated worlds. "Communication under the sign of Hermes borrows from twisted pathways, shortcuts and parallel routes," she says, "it makes many round trips and ends up sometimes in meaningful dead ends. The paths of Hermes are multiple, and he never tires of inventing nuances of voice, tone or gesture to place his

message in the right context. Hermes knows better than to collide head-on with authority; it has to be outsmarted, turned aside, turned into laughter. Knowing how to distract, amuse or ridicule authority can be just as effective as heroic confrontations.”¹ “Pompous high-flown appollonic prophecies are hijacked by Hermes,” notes Patrick Harpur, former editor of the alchemical journal *Mercurius*, “who twists them and sows them with absurdities and untruths, seeking to restrain the single-minded, upward-striving flights of the spirit with the slow, ambiguous, downward-moving reflectiveness of soul. His deceptions can, like Art, be dressings-up which entice us into a deeper truth. He misleads us, but often for our own good, leading us out of *our* ideas of truth—out of literal-ism, for instance—and into the tricky paradoxical twilight of the daimonic realm. Not for nothing is he venerated as the god of borders and crossroads where different realities intersect.”²

Hermetic consciousness is fluid and uses images and symbols to discuss ineffable truths far beyond the reach of Apollo. Hermetic communication seeks to expose hidden meanings and underlying truths that may have no rational basis at all. This is anything but a literal approach to things; in fact, “hermeneutics” is the art of finding and explaining the meaning of the Scriptures and literary works that lies “between the lines.”

Creating the Hermes Field

The Hermetic state of consciousness opens doors that apollonian consciousness does not even know exist. The search for the highest truths begins by hermetically sealing the mind from outside influences, so a person achieves true objectivity by separation from ego prejudice and illusion. Only from this centered viewpoint can true reality be perceived, and no learning can take place, no truth can be expressed, unless this Hermes Field prevails. Robert Bly wrote in his book *Iron John*:

When we are in Hermes’ Field, messages pass with fantastic speed between the brain and the fingertips, between the heart and the tear ducts, between the genitals and the eyes, between the part of us that suffers and the part of us that laughs. Hermes is Mercury, and we know that mercury cannot

be held in the hand—it rolls everywhere, separates into tiny drops, joins again, falls on the floor, rolls under the table, moves with amazing quickness. It is correctly called Quicksilver. Sometimes when friends are talking in a closed room, the heat of conversation begins to increase: witty things are said; contributions flow from all sides; leaps of imagination appear; the genuinely spiritual follows an instant after the genuinely obscene. Hermes has arrived. At some beautiful moment of the conversation a silence falls that feels mysterious; everyone hesitates to break it. In Spain until the fifteenth century that silence was called Hermes' Silence. Hermes slips in true information in that split second between the moment your tongue starts and the moment it finishes. Hermes moves faster than our thought. What people call a Freudian slip is really a Hermes Precision. Hermes punctures pomposity, piety, sureness, self-satisfaction. ³

How do we enter the Hermes Field? First, we have to get beyond our own egos and gender styles. That means not engaging in masculine “pissing contests” or feminine drama and self-martyrdom. Hermetic arguments are exchanges of inspiration and insight geared toward exposing the bare truth of a situation. “In Truth, without deceit, certain, and most veritable” is how the tablet tells us to enter the Hermes Field. Thought here is never designed to enhance one's position, to make someone look better or worse than someone else, to support someone's belief system, or to score points in the art of argument. Conversations, thoughts, and meditative sessions taking place in a Hermes Field are marked by a quiet expectation and gentle persuasion that results in a sensation of flowing truth. Proceed “gently and with great Ingenuity,” the tablet tells us at this stage.

Hermes may well be part of the fabric of reality, manipulating order and chaos through his connection with the One Thing. “Hermes,” says physicist Fred Alan Wolf in his book *The Spiritual Universe*, “directs the flow of energy by making something from nothing. Bringing order out of chaos and chaos out of order requires the trickster's prestidigitation, for the trickster is always upsetting the established order of things in surprising ways; thus, he is the creator of confusion as he crosses from the world of order into the world of chaos and the creator of order as he crosses back.”⁴ The remarkable fluency within the Hermes Field is never pushed out like artificial logic but is a wave of inspiration that one simply rides.

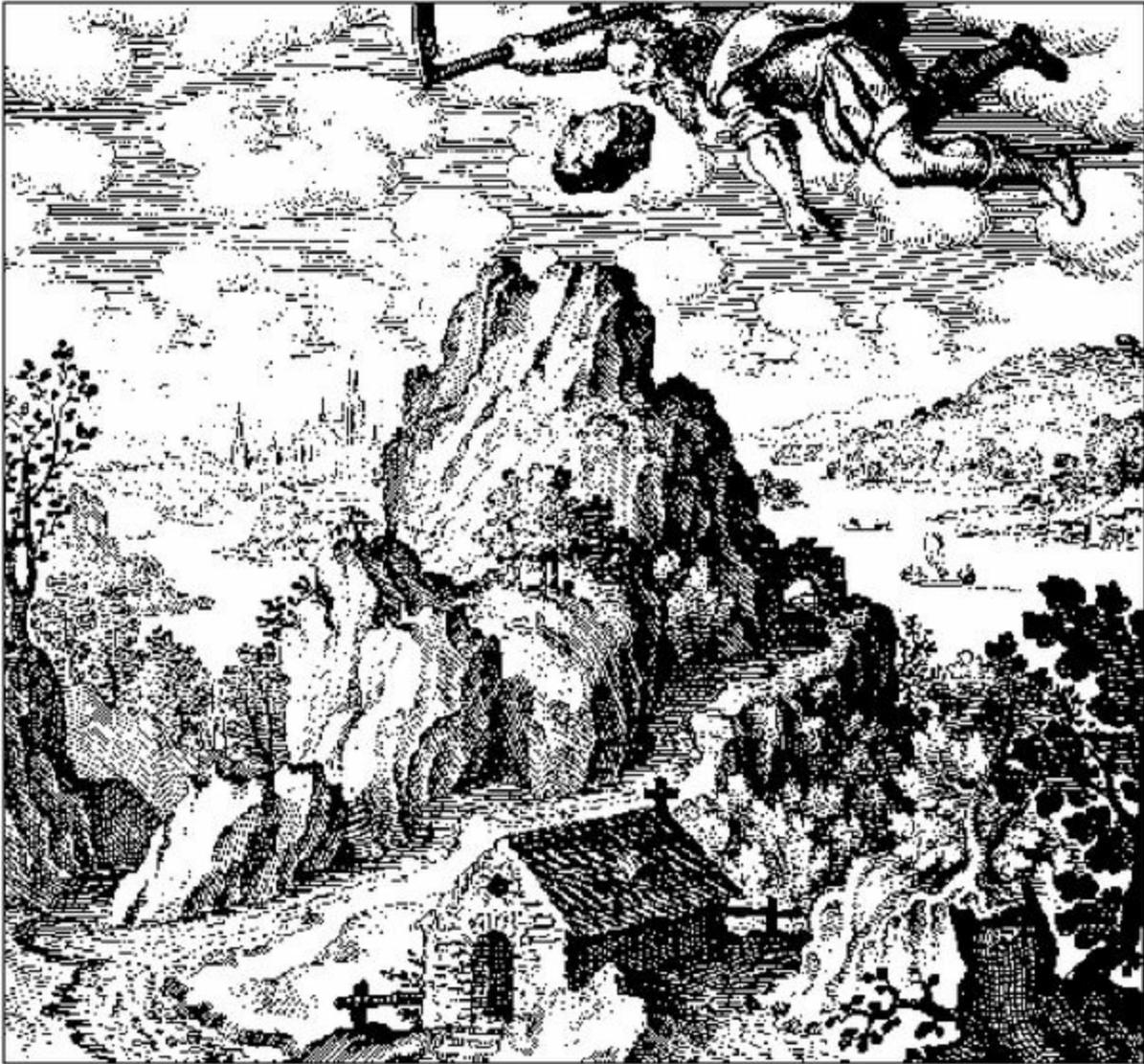
When riding this Hermetic wave—or “rave,” as some have described it—there is no striving to establish steps of deduction or present examples in support of inductive inferences. This state of consciousness has nothing to prove, and only the intuitive search for genuine truth guides it. It is “enthusiastic” in the original Greek meaning of *enthous*: to be possessed by God. The coupling of our deepest subjective desire with the highest objective truth within the Hermes Field results in an internal, conquering state of mind that can be used to reclaim our power from others who have inflicted their own rigid beliefs on us. Although being in a Hermes Field gives us greater personal confidence, our thoughts themselves seem to come from a higher mind for which we cannot take credit. The *Corpus Hermeticum* was written within the Hermes Field, and that explains why its authors credited Hermes and not themselves. Mediums, psychics, and channelers enter the Hermes Field to gain access to ideas not normally their own, and many modern authors have used this technique to create insightful works. Examples include such inspired works as Richard Bach’s *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and Neale Donald Walsch’s *Conversations with God* series.

Alchemy of the Paranormal

Can the Hermes Field exist outside of people’s minds? Most of the evidence that it can do just that comes from the field of paranormal research, which is a modern witches’ brew of anecdotal evidence buffeted about by disconcerting currents of truth and lies, wishful thinking and hoaxes, half-truths and breakthroughs—how like Hermes himself! I began investigating borderline phenomena while still in graduate school, and impossible though it may seem, I had hoped to develop a scientific model of the paranormal. Of course, I soon realized that these occurrences do not fit within the accepted limits of cause and effect, and before long I surrendered the mantle of academia to take a closer look at the wide range of events that science had tossed onto the paranormal trash heap. The first thing I noticed was that people involved in genuine paranormal encounters were affected in similar ways by the incidents. They all went through stages that ranged from an

initial annihilation of ego and selfhood to a final reassemblage of a new belief system from the scraps that were left of their lives. Receiving no support from traditional sources, these spiritually displaced persons met regularly in small groups seeking support and expanding on what happened to them. In describing the alternate reality they had glimpsed, many of these experiencers used the same alchemical imagery that Carl Jung had documented in people undergoing psychological individuation—a transformative process that involves the purification and redemption of rejected unconscious elements. The encounters I investigated were expressions of that same yearning in our driven souls to experience transformation, and I confirmed what Jung had already proven: that alchemy still lives in the mind of modern people much as it did in the ancient civilizations of Egypt and China or during its heyday in medieval Europe.

In researching the surrealistic visions of the alchemists, I found descriptions of the subject of their experiments, the mysterious First Matter, which fit remarkably well with the properties of the morphing force I identified at the root of many paranormal events. The alchemists treated this invisible energy like a tangible substance that could be accumulated, transformed, and controlled by the One Mind. Other paranormal researchers have noticed this same influence—the Hermes Factor.



Saturn vomiting the Stone is symbolic of the unconscious projection of images into reality. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfurt 1617)

Keith Thompson, in his erudite study of the UFO phenomenon, *Angels and Aliens*, notes: “The proverbial landing on the White House lawn in a flying saucer wouldn’t be Hermes’ style, which is more suited to appearing as suggestive blips on radar. Such blips are typically designated by radar operators as ‘uncorrelated target.’ Thus Hermes’ presence is noted, but ambiguously; perfect for a god that [has been described] as ‘multi-faceted, shimmering, impossible to pin down.’”⁵

Patrick Harpur, in his breakthrough book *Daimonic Reality*:

Understanding Otherworldly Encounters, also detects the presence of Hermes behind paranormal events. “I suspect that the god whose hand can be discerned in crop circles is the god who lies behind all anomalous events, whose very nature is to be more daimonic than the other gods because he scurries on winged sandals between the Olympic pantheon and earth, bearing messages to the world of men. I mean Hermes.”

Other researchers take Hermes’ presence literally. British cerealogist Simon Burton believes crop circles are the hand of Hermes writing to us and uses the Emerald Tablet to decipher the meaning of the strange symbols. Using the compelling glyphs from the famous Milk Hill case, in which a small UFO was actually photographed making the pictograms, he developed three rules of interpretation based on the following Hermetic aphorisms: “Conceal the secret in plain view”; “As Above, so Below”; and “All things can be perfected.” “These three pearls of alchemical wisdom,” says Burton, “provide the protocol necessary to read the Milk Hill Script. I have called this protocol the ‘Smaragdina Protocol’ after the *Tabula Smaragdina*, the archetypal alchemical Emerald Tablet.” Applying his protocol to the Milk Hill Script, Burton discovered that the Circlemaker had written the Latin phrase “*Occului nuncio*,” which means “I have hidden, at present.”⁶

There is another “protocol” contained in the Emerald Tablet that can be seen in paranormal encounters, and that is the basic Pattern, the Seven Steps of Transformation. Every genuine paranormal case carried through to its conclusion contains these seven markers, and I have used them to ascertain the stage through which an experiencer is moving in order to help him or her understand what is going on and what to expect. I have accumulated thousands of examples of true-life paranormal encounters (many of which I detailed in my book *Haunted Places: The National Directory*), but they all contain basically the same pattern. Paranormal encounters begin with a fiery Calcination in which light phenomena such as balls of fire, lights in the sky, tunnels of light, miasmatic mists, or glowing apparitions catch the attention of witnesses and build excitement. Experiencers describe feeling “on fire” with their “thoughts racing a mile a minute.” The notion of light and fire takes on a whole new meaning and may even become a topic of discussion with the visitors from beyond, as in the classic abduction case of Betty Andreasson (in South Ashburnham, Massachusetts, in January 1967). Betty was home with

her father and seven children when the house suddenly went dark, and the only light emanated from their backyard, where a bright pink object had landed. Four short, gray creatures then entered the house and took Betty into the craft where they examined her. When she asked them what they wanted, one of the aliens told her that they were looking for “knowledge tried by Fire.” This is a genuine case, not because Betty was *really* abducted by space aliens, but because the fires of alchemy worked profound and lasting changes in her.

Those fires continue to burn even after the initial experience, as witnesses try to integrate what happened or find some rational explanation. By this time, however, many of their lifelong beliefs are starting to crumble and the process of Dissolution takes hold. One case of Dissolution involved the crew of an Army Reserve helicopter that was buzzed by a red-glowing metallic object in Ohio in 1973. The UFO flooded the cockpit with an intense green light and lifted the copter 1,300 feet higher than it had been. The incident was recorded on radar and seen by witnesses on the ground, but government spokesmen insisted the helicopter had encountered a meteorite. But for some odd reason, the pentagon started calling Captain Lawrence Coyne and his crew on a regular basis to inquire if they were having any unusual dreams, special feelings associated with spherical shapes, or odd bodily sensations. In fact, Coyne and one other member of the crew were having strange dreams that included vivid out-of-body experiences.

Unless experiencers are able to enter the Separation phase and “get a hold of themselves,” devastating mental collapse might result. That is what happened to nineteen-year-old Calvin Parker after he and forty-five-year-old Charles Hickson were abducted while they were fishing off a pier (in Pascagoula, Mississippi, in October 1973). It took years for Parker to recuperate fully, although Hickson underwent a successful Separation and his new Conjunction changed him from a gruff welder into a very spiritual person. Hickson refused lucrative offers to make a movie about the incident by cautioning: “This experience is not about money.”

During Conjunction, a new system of beliefs is constellated that encompasses the reality of the Other Side; however, eventually the product of this Conjunction weakens as gnawing doubts from ego and outsiders sap its life. A period of Putrefaction and confusion sets in as the experiencer tries to integrate the experience at a deeper level. If Fermentation occurs, there may

be continuing contact with the “presence” that expands and elaborates on the initial experience. That is exactly the sequence of operations that Whitley Strieber went through after a terrifying abduction experience in New York in December 1985. After much panic and recanting, Strieber was able to distill the true meaning of his continuing confrontations with the Other Side. “I think that there’s a supermind,” he said recently of his experiences, “and I think the physical level of humanity is entering the supermind.” During Distillation, new objectivity is obtained and the entire experience is seen in a broader light. Coagulation results in new confidence and is often expressed in the establishment of discussion or support groups for others. Whitley Strieber is now active in helping others through their own experiences and believes there is a “Secret School” that is giving us instruction on how to exist in higher consciousness.

The overall process of paranormal alchemy might be clearer if we concentrated on a single case. A good example, and probably the scariest case I was ever involved in, took place in Grass Lake, Illinois, a small farming community on the Illinois-Wisconsin border. Calcination began in July 1973, when three separate families from around the tiny lake started calling the police and fire departments reporting strange orange “fires” in the sky. The authorities responded over a dozen times, and on several occasions officers witnessed the lights, but there was not much they could do to keep them away. After two years, they just stopped responding. At that point, the families banded together and contacted a number of UFO organizations, including two with which I was associated. I was asked to investigate and spent several days at the lake interviewing eleven different individuals trying to sort through their bizarre experiences. One of the witnesses, Nancy Hansen, kept a log book of everything that happened. A couple of entries from her journal illustrate how innocently things began:

July 1-3, 1973. We went to the other side of the lake and talked to a witness who said it looked like an orange light with a red rim. He had a lot of close sightings of the UFOs. He lives on the highest hill in that area.

August 3, 1974. We now have one right over the lake. On closer inspection with binoculars, it resembles a fried egg—a dark dome with solid light rim, bordered with red and green lights. Five witnesses watched it, and it showed up every night.

Before long, the sightings of the orange lights became a nightly

occurrence, and true Dissolution began. Several family members started having weird dreams that woke them in the middle of the night. Others started having a nagging feeling that the lights represented some kind of outside intelligence, and they contacted a local New Age group to see if they could help them establish psychic contact with the lights. Their efforts were deemed successful when some of the lights in the sky started blinking on and off in apparent response to their united concentration and later even blinked some messages back in International Morse Code, which the group had telepathically “taught” the lights. However, with the escalation in communication, Separation into the real and the unreal began in earnest, and a lot of very strange things began to happen in the homes of families. Among the effects were loud knocking and clawing sounds, sounds of things falling but nothing dropping, sudden foul sulfurous odors, lights and radios turning on by themselves, clocks turning ahead, furniture falling over, unexplainable variations in room temperature, and the disappearance and later return of common personal objects such as pens, flashlights, house slippers, and purses. One family reported that a bedroom pillow had suddenly begun taking moisture out of the air until it became totally saturated and began soaking the bed. They then took the pillow into the front room and removed the pillow case, at which time the pillow case started drying but the whole room turned ice cold. All three families described times when their houses would “bounce” up and down, shaking from the foundation up for no apparent reason.

The Conjunction of the Above and Below took the form of humanoid creatures appearing on their properties. One family awoke to find the whole side of their house had deep, clawlike indentations and scratches in the siding. At that same address on Thanks-giving Day 1973, a resident fired a full round of bullets at a hairy, humanoid creature he had seen prowling near the house. Other elusive humanoid shapes were reported actually roaming through the homes of the Grass Lake families. Again I quote a few examples from Nancy’s journal:

February 8, 1974. While my daughter Pam was in bed, something pulled the covers and gently pinched her toes like it had a claw instead of a hand. She thought it was trying to pull her out of bed. She said it got real cold just before and while this happened. She was so scared she stayed up the rest of the night.

August 5, 1974. Jo called from her new house to say that invisible chains were drug up and down her stairs. Later a small, gold-metallic-suited blond creature walked through her bedroom, stopped a minute, and then went through some invisible door.

August 26, 1975. Pam got up last night and as she came up the hallway, she saw a humanoid figure standing outside our front room window. At first she said she thought it was a gorilla but then she could see it had pincer-like hands.

At this point, the families started seeing what the elusive humanoid shapes invading their homes actually looked like. At first they could see them clearly only in mirrors, but as their Fermentation progressed, they were able to look at them directly. There were wild Bigfoot types which seemed to be under the control of sinister reptilian creatures with greenish scales and six-fingered claws. The other type were short, gray-skinned creatures with fat heads and bright, wide eyes that elongated along the sides of their heads and who sometimes wore gold uniforms. Once the witnesses were able to see the creatures, the reptilian entities started chasing them even more frequently, and all the homes had examples of horrible, deep scratch marks on the walls and furniture. The New Age group proposed that the aliens represented two opposing forces battling to gain control over their lives. The idea seemed to comfort the experiencers, who now at least saw some purpose to the bizarre world into which they had been catapulted. As an investigator, I was unknowingly trying to help invoke Distillation in the experiencers to give them distance and perspective for what they had unleashed. Of course, I could not be certain if they had unleashed mass hysteria or were witnessing genuine events. It was long before abduction reports became common, and Harvard professors were staking their reputations that they were really happening.

One evening I was sitting at the kitchen table going over Nancy's journals with her. With her husband's mental condition rapidly deteriorating and both her daughters terrified to go to bed at night, I asked Nancy why they just did not pack up and move away. In a moment of frankness, she admitted that none of the families had enough money to leave. Their homes were over a hundred years old and had been passed down from generation to generation. They were originally simple farmers and now had to work menial jobs just to make ends meet. As if confirming its seasoned age, the house "settled" a

little. I assumed it had to do with the foundation, but seconds later there was a loud *thump* on the outside wall. Thinking something had hit the side of the house, I jumped up, ran over to a half-open dining room window, and stuck my head out. Turning my head to the right, I watched in astonishment as an invisible hand made fresh claw marks about three inches long in the faded red-wood siding. The claws actually dug in deeper as soon as I started watching, and I could see the pieces fall to the ground as the fresh wood underneath was exposed. Of course, there was no way anyone could have faked that; there were no trees anywhere, the long drive-way was empty, and the pitch of the roof was too steep for anyone to hide there. I did not exactly run screaming from the house, but I quickly excused myself without telling anyone what I saw and headed for my car.

Inside the car, I immediately tried to figure out some explanation for what I had seen, but Hermes had left no trail, and I could find no clues. As I started down the dark blacktop road back to the expressway, my headlights began blinking on and off in Morse code fashion. I pulled to the side of the road and watched in amazement as the lights danced on and off with my ammeter remaining dead steady, as if my lights were drawing their power from another source. Even after I turned off the switch, they continued flashing for about four minutes, when they abruptly stopped. After that, my lights worked fine all the way back to Chicago. I never saw any creatures or UFOs at Grass Lake, and I doubt if there really ever were any. But I did witness an astonishing Coagulation of directed energy that resulted in undeniable changes in physical reality.

The next day, I told other investigators what had happened at Grass Lake, and we took the car in to be checked by a mechanic. He found nothing wrong with the wiring, but did discover that the left hand side of the car had been magnetized. One of his screwdrivers stuck to one side but not the other. Furthermore, a Geiger counter I had in the trunk was pegged out full scale and ruined, even though it was turned off. I returned to Grass Lake a week later with recording equipment ready to stake out the lake, but by that time the families were in real crisis and had contacted a local church group. The minister told the experiencers that they had brought demons into their homes by their “sinful” acts. By the time I returned, they had already performed an exorcism in one of the houses, and I was asked not to come back. I did take photos and wrote up the case in the *Journal of UFOlogy* (Spring 1976), but

the incident was simply too far out to be taken seriously. Without the proper psychological intervention, the families on the lake eventually just fell to pieces. Within the next three years, they were all split apart by guilt and confusion that resulted in personal breakdowns and divorce. I was never able to help these frightened people achieve the Distillation of their horrifying experiences nor save the Ferment of the Conjunction of their unconscious expectations and imaginations.

I think the truth about what happened at Grass Lake is best summed up in the words of Patrick Harpur: “[Hermes] forces us to unmask ourselves in the face of his emissaries—enigmatic marks on the cornfields, big-eyed aliens who abduct us into spacecraft, ‘frustrators’ who dictate gibberish through automatic writing, entities whose revelations are delusions and whose delusions, if we persist in them, can lead to revelation. He manipulates us, knows our every thought—knows us better than we know ourselves. He is secretive, ruthless, impersonal, and inhuman. Like a psychopath. Like a god. He is less the Devil than Lucifer, who deceives both in order to destroy and in order to bring light. If we do not know ourselves—that is, know, discern, heed our daimons and demons—we are easy meat.”

All three families on Grass Lake were “easy meat,” though I would hope that we have learned something about treating their wounds, because, in many ways, paranormal experiencers are at the cutting edge of consciousness and need all the support we can give them. Today, of course, such unsettling stories are almost commonplace. A 1992 Roper poll discovered that there may be as many as 2,250,000 Americans who believe they have been abducted in the last forty years. What the public does not realize is that there is only one person responsible for every one of them, just as there is only one person’s face behind apparitions of any kind. It is Hermes—and the spread of paranormal activity in the last fifty years is just one sign of his increased presence in the world.

¹ From Ginette Paris, *Pagan Grace: Dionysus, Hermes, and Goddess Memories in Daily Life* (Dallas, Texas: Spring Publications, 1990).

² From Patrick Harpur, *Daimonic Reality: Understanding Otherworld Encounters* (New York, New York: Penguin Arkana, 1995).

³ From Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1990). Bly’s book discusses the workings of the alchemical metal iron in men.

[4](#) From Fred Alan Wolf, *The Spiritual Universe: How Quantum Physics Proves the Existence of the Soul* (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

[5](#) From Keith Thompson, *Angels and Aliens: UFOs and the Mythic Imagination* (New York, New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993).

[6](#) Simon Burton's method is detailed in his article, "The Smaragdina Protocol," which appeared in *The Cerealologist* 16 (London, 1996). For more information about interpreting crop circles, see Alick Bartholomew, ed., *Crop Circles: Harbingers of World Change* (Bath, England: Gateway Books, 1992).



Chapter 23

ALCHEMY OF THE MILLENNIUM

The Hermes Conspiracy

If we are to believe the many legends about the Emerald Tablet, then it has been part of mankind's heritage since the very beginning, and as one of the few constants in human history, this artifact has a lot to say about our future as well as our past. The circuitous path of the Emerald Tablet through human history is not entirely due to the doctrine of secrecy adhered to by its guardians. Even Hermes declared that he "once placed all these marvelous signs openly before all eyes." The concealment of the teachings of the Emerald Tablet became necessary because of a political backlash that began with the murders of Akhenaten and Nefertiti in 1347 B.C.E., although the perpetrators have really been the same throughout history. It started with the jealous priests of Amen and continues to this day with fundamentalist leaders who deny the common people the right to know God directly.

By the time Alexander unearthed Hermes' tomb, the old religion of Egypt had died out, although there were many newer religions and developing paradigms ready to suppress the treasures he wanted to share with the world. By 300 B.C.E., the arguments among the Alexandrian translators of the Emerald Tablet had turned bitter and detracted from the cosmopolitan spirit of the document. The Egyptian priests attempted to underscore its Egyptian origins, the Jewish translators wanted it to conform to the view of creation contained in Genesis, and the Greeks wanted to use it to support their own empirical philosophy. The scholarly debates were soon drowned out, however, by shouts of invading armies. Roman Emperor Diocletian invaded Alexandria around 275 B.C.E. and ordered all books on alchemy burned, though the revered tablet was somehow spared. Julius Caesar invaded in 47 B.C.E. and more sections of the great library were burned during the fighting. But the real damage to the Alexandria library, and dozens of others

throughout the world, came after the Edict of Bishop Theodosius was issued in 389 C.E. That communiqué instructed followers of Jesus to destroy all “anti-Christian” writings. Seven years earlier, another edict had declared that any opposition to the church’s creed was punishable by death, so the zealots felt justified in killing anyone who got in their way. In 415 C.E., the last librarian of Alexandria and his daughter were horribly mutilated and murdered by Christian mobs.

Unfortunately, about this time, Balinas (Apollonius of Tyana), who had died three centuries earlier, became the pawn in a power struggle between Romans and Christians. The prominent Roman governor Hierocles wrote a book describing Apollonius of Tyana as superior to Christ, and other government officials as well as pagan cultists used the reputation of Apollonius as a saintly wonder-worker in an effort to counteract the spread of Christianity. When the church took the reins of power, all copies of Apollonius’s many books were burned, and his followers were persecuted and their shrines destroyed. Copies of remaining works of Apollonius, and possibly the original Emerald Tablet itself, were said to have been taken to the fabled Hall of Records on the Giza Plateau in Egypt only weeks before the Christians began burning the libraries in Alexandria. By the beginning of the fifth century, nearly everything Apollonius had ever written was destroyed by Christian zealots.

By the end of the fifth century, the church replaced the Roman Empire, and Christian leaders in Europe placed a stranglehold on the minds of their subjects. Ancient libraries were burned down all over Europe, and the study or discussion of philosophy or any secular discipline—even common geography—was outlawed. Questioning or scientific experimentation of any kind was considered an affront to church dogma. Pope Gregory declared that all education originated with the devil and then even outlawed the reading of the Bible by laymen. Just possessing a copy of the Bible in a vernacular translation was grounds for the death penalty. Schools and centers of learning were closed, and works of art and imagination were especially frowned upon. Hundreds of beautiful temples were leveled to the ground and monks were assigned to “defile the site with their excrement” and prevent anyone from rebuilding. The hierophant of the Eleusinian Mysteries described the destruction of sacred sites as a “fabulous and formless darkness mastering the loveliness of the world.” At many temple sites, the church tried to replace the

original pagan gods with its own. In Hermes' case, the church substituted the archangel Michael, the Christian psychopomp and Angel of Death. On the ruins of temples formerly dedicated to Hermes, the church rededicated the sites to St. Michael. One example is a hill still sacred to Hermes in France known as St. Michael-Mont-Mercure, which, incidentally, is directly across the English Channel from Michael's Mount in England. Hermetic rites are performed at these sacred sites to this day.

The medieval church tightened its hold on the people by forbidding the study of medicine and declaring that all diseases were caused by the devil and could only be cured through exorcisms performed by its representatives. The church flagrantly ignored all previous scientific discoveries and forbade the study of mathematics and astronomy. Although Alexandrian scholars had calculated the circumference of the earth with a miniscule degree of error, the church now declared that the earth was flat, almost as if to deny the possibilities of the vertical "escape" route of Hermes and to emphasize its horizontal point of view. Finally, one of the leaders of the book-burning effort was able to boast: "Every trace of the old philosophy and literature of the ancient world has vanished from the face of the earth." When the Arabs took control of Alexandria in 640 C.E., only 50,000 out of the original 800,000 scrolls in the library remained intact. Just before the vandalism erupted, Greek copies of the Emerald Tablet had been smuggled into Arabia through either Egypt or Syria. With the Moslem occupation of Morocco in the eighth century, Arabian versions of the tablet then entered Spain, and from there circulated secretly into the rest of Europe.

By the beginning of the second millennium, the church had firm control over the minds of Europeans and set its sights on the Holy Land. In 1095, Pope Urban II organized a "People's Crusade" to forcibly convert the Holy Lands to Christianity. Anyone who joined was released from punishment by the laws of God or man and was guaranteed forgiveness for all their sins. They were also allowed to go directly to heaven without having to pass through purgatory. That gave over 250,000 Crusaders the license to loot and kill without remorse, and they plundered not only the Holy Land but everywhere in between. Over 10,000 Jews were slaughtered in the Rhineland, along with thousands more innocent people in Hungary and Greece. Many Crusaders were themselves claimed by fighting and disease, and others were sold off as slaves by their fellow Christians. By the time the invading band of

marauders reached Turkey, they numbered only 7,000 and were quickly dispatched by the “infidels.” The embarrassed church immediately countered with another Crusade that laid siege to Jerusalem for a month and finally succeeded in massacring the entire population. Men, women, and children were shuffled into synagogues and burned alive as a “sacrifice to Jesus.” The Christian Crusades would continue for the next four centuries.¹

Meanwhile, things were getting out of control at home, and the church started recruiting Christian soldiers to purge Europe of a resurgence of Hermetic ideas. Starting around 1200, a campaign of wholesale extermination was carried out in Prussia, Poland, Lithuania, France, Germany, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and other scattered regions throughout Europe. In an effort to erase heresy from freethinking France, half the population was destroyed. The Cathars (literally, “the Pure Ones”) were a Gnostic group in southern France that particularly worried the papacy. Cathars taught that the material world was an illusion and believed, as Hermes taught, that the opposing forces of light and darkness were behind creation. It was said they practiced pagan rituals and had a hoard of books that preserved the old teachings. The Cathars did nothing to placate the church and openly accused the Pope of being the puppet of Satan. Although it took twenty years, the church finally succeeded in silencing the Cathars. In the town of Beziers alone, 20,000 suspected Cathars were killed in a few days and the city burned to the ground. When asked how his men could discern the heretics from the innocents in the towns they attacked in France, the papal emissary declared: “Kill them all! God will know His own.”

The French were fearless through those trying times. One example was Joachim of Fiore, who was put to death in 1202 for preaching that human beings have spiritual bodies that can be united with God during private meditation. Another example is Amaury of Bene, a lecturer at the University of Paris who was bold enough to discuss the works of John Scotus Erigena. Erigena proclaimed a doctrine of the Free Spirit and proclaimed that the entire church was destined to decay; in its place would emerge a new era in human spirituality based on the inner consciousness of God in which no organized priesthood would be needed. In 1210, Amaury and eleven of his students were burned at the stake, but his forbidden Hermetic doctrine became the Free Spirit Movement and inspired other groups to form,

including the Beghards and the Beguines in France and the Friends of God in Germany. The entire Free Spirit movement was condemned at the Council of Vienne in 1312, and afterwards many of its members were put to death. “These heretics claim the soul’s inward voice is safer than the truths preached in the Church,” explained an incredulous Bishop of Strasbourg, “and assert that nobody will be lost in the end, not even Jews or Saracens, because their spirits will return to God!”

The church also turned its attention to another Hermetic heresy that had its roots in France. The Knights Templars were a Christian religious order formed in 1118 to protect pilgrims to the Holy Lands during the Crusades. At their height they numbered only 20,000 members, but the church became increasingly suspicious of them. They had as their base the site of King Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem, where legend says they unearthed proof of a secret esoteric tradition that dated back to Abraham. Some reports say they discovered the Ark of the Covenant, which allegedly contained the Emerald Tablet that Hermes (or possibly Akhenaten) had given the daughter of Moses for safekeeping. In any case, the Templars were well versed in Hermes’ teachings and had maintained close connections with the Essenes, the Gnostic group that Balinas spent time with during his travels, as well as Sufi and Zoroastrian sects. Several Templars were alchemists and others studied the Cabala, and the group was said to worship a statue representing the three aspects of Hermes. Known as the Baphomet, it was a gargoyle statue depicting an androgynous god with a long beard and two faces sitting on a large cubic stone. The horned, goatlike figure had breasts and held the caduceus, which concealed its erect penis. The pineal area above its eyes was marked with a pentagram, and one hand pointed up while the other pointed down in the classic pose of Hermes. The term “Baphomet” has no known origins but is said to be derived either from the Essene word for Sophia (Wisdom) or from ancient Enochian words meaning “Opener of the Door.” Some papal advisors suspected the Templars’ true mission was to merge the Hermetic and Christian teachings, and in 1307, Pope Clement ordered the arrest of the Templars in every country. In 1314, the final Grand Master of the group, Jacques de Molay, was burned at the stake. According to tradition, the few surviving members of the Templars went underground to establish Freemasonry and the Rosicrucian movement.

Concerned by the rise of the Hermetic viewpoint that emphasized the

spiritual over the material, Pope John issued a papal bull in 1325 that declared it blasphemy to say Jesus was poor or that having no property was a superior Christian trait. To punctuate his edict, he had 114 so-called “Spiritual Franciscans” burned alive. The new rule was used to squash the notion of personal spiritual improvement in groups like the Waldenses in southern France. Founded by Peter Waldo, they believed that it was possible to pray to God in your own home and insisted that women had the right to preach.

As if to underscore the importance of material possessions, the church became increasingly mercenary. It started peddling “indulgences”—absolute pardons from God for any offense from drunkenness to rape and murder, although the price was adjusted for the severity of the crime. Several popes became medieval millionaires by building commercial empires built on indulgences, which, after all, were the ideal product because they required no raw material or investment of any kind. Priests started charging for communion and also promoted the doctrine of oblation, in which parents paid them to take unwanted children and were “reimbursed” with promises of eternal bliss.

After papal authorities issued an order that the belongings of anyone who committed suicide had to be turned over to the church, they realized how easy it was to seize a person’s assets. The real money maker for the church was the Inquisition, and the inquisitors became some of the richest men in Europe. Immediately after a person was arrested, his or her property was confiscated by the church and never returned, even if the person confessed to the “crime.” While in prison the accused even had to pay for their own food, and so many were dying of starvation before being judged that Pope Gregory XI had to issue indulgences to anyone who would donate food for them. The inquisitors started fining people large sums for simple slips of the tongue and set up protection rackets in which the rich avoided persecution by paying annual premiums.

Aside from bringing in large sums of cash, the Inquisition also dissolved a major threat to the patriarchal church: the rise of “feminine” influences. The church fathers saw feminine consciousness as a kind of Hermetic passive resistance that could severely undermine their authority, and any woman who healed with herbs or was close to nature was accused of practicing the Hermetic Arts. Anything feminine was suspect. Little girls could be tortured

for witchcraft from the age of nine and boys from the age of ten. Homosexuals were sometimes thrown into the fires of burning witches, and the derogatory term “faggot” originally referred to the small logs used to start bonfires. Cats were also seen as incarnations of the feminine archetype, and the Inquisition proclaimed that all cats were demons to be burned with witches. At Easter, cats were tied in wicker baskets and thrown into bonfires. The sickening cries of the felines being burned alive in Easter baskets filled the squares of many medieval towns. Another widespread custom was entombing a live cat in the foundations of new buildings to ward off evil. Millions of cats were put to death, and in true Hermetic irony, that caused the rat population to surge, which resulted in the rapid spread of the bubonic plague in the fourteenth century. At least one pope, scores of inquisitors, and half the predominantly Catholic population are thought to have perished from the Black Death in just twenty years.

The true teachings of Hermes survived only in a few stubborn pockets of resistance. By moving around constantly, the gypsies kept one step ahead of the Christian soldiers, and after many bloody attempts, the church just gave up trying to control Bohemia and allowed them to form their own Moravian Church. Medieval alchemists, for the most part, lived on a fine line between Hermeticism and heresy, but, by disguising their spiritual work in veiled Christian terms, they got along fairly well with church authorities. For a time, the church actually quoted the *Corpus Hermeticum* to support their doctrines, though when the church fathers started feeling the swell of a Hermetic Renaissance under their feet, they quickly changed their opinions of its usefulness.

One of the whitecaps on that sea of unrest was an Italian Hermeticist by the name of Giordano Bruno. He openly lectured on Hermes’ philosophy and portrayed the universe as an infinite living presence full of alchemical influences. Like Akhenaten, he saw the sun as the grand symbol of these magical processes and declared it to be the center of the Cosmos. The Inquisition arrested him in 1592 and began a seven-year trial in which the tribunal hashed through all his philosophical speculations and then demanded he recant them. When he refused, the judges sentenced him to death. On February 8, 1600, a gag was tied around Bruno’s tongue and he was burned at the stake. After that clear sign from the Vatican, church scholars banded together to defend orthodoxy against what one German cleric called “fanatics

such as the Alchemists, Agnostics, Rosicrucians, Quakers, Anabaptists, Quietists, etc., of which Hermes is the patriarch.” They announced that Hermes himself never existed because he was not mentioned in the Bible, and they portrayed the *Corpus Hermeticum* as an organized effort by Neoplatonists of the third century to prop up dying paganism. Even in the nineteenth century, some scholars were so upset by the ancient dating of the Hermetic tradition in the works of the Alexandrian scribe Manetho that they attempted to delete all references, despite the fact that Plato had reported similar translations dating from before the First Dynasty.²

Actually, the Christian religion was never an easy sell in Europe. Europeans had centuries of pagan and Hermetic tradition behind them when Christians started preaching to them about a new savior from a distant nation. In the beginning, the Christians appropriated pagan symbols and reinterpreted the Bible to get people to accept their message. But the early Catholic Church was blinded by the hubric conviction that it was the one and only “Universal Church,” and by the time it was finished inflicting its new religion on Europeans, it had killed an estimated eight million of them. In its smug denial of the human spirit, the medieval church did unconscionable damage to the souls of millions more, bringing on the Dark Ages and interfering with the alchemy of the whole world.

The Hermes Conspiracy is not yet ended. The Vatican continues to try to rewrite history even while maintaining the efficacy of the Edicts of Inquisition, which have never been rescinded. In defense of the Inquisition, Pope Pius X supported a statement in the early twentieth century which read: “The naked fact that the Church, of her own authority, has tried heretics and delivered them to death, shows that she truly has the right of killing. Who dares say the Church has erred in a matter so grave as this?”

The typical attitude of the church toward Hermeticism was demonstrated in the seventeenth century trial of Miguel de Molinos. The popular author on the art of contemplation had simply asserted that a person could move from devotional ritual to solitary meditation in the presence of God. For making that simple statement, he was sentenced to prison, where he died nine years later. During the trial, the official position of the church was read into the record. According to the papal representative, the duty of the church was to preserve form and ritual, and maintain the physical presence of the church,

and not to invoke the spiritual enlightenment of individuals.

The Hermetic concept of personal spiritual development is still anathema to the church. In 1993, Matthew Fox, a Dominican priest for thirty-three years, was expelled by the church for his teachings on “Creation Spirituality.” The gentle priest’s views blended environmentalism and feminism with Hermetic ideas that portrayed humans as participants in creation. His ideas are still blasphemy to the Vatican, and four hundred years earlier Matthew Fox would have been burned alive for having them.³

There is some evidence, however, that the orthodox church is slowly changing. Throughout history, the church fathers have staunchly resisted any meaningful participation by women at the higher levels of the church. About as far as they went was to replace pagan goddesses with images of the Virgin Mary. Temples devoted to the Egyptian mother goddess Isis, for instance, were rededicated to the Virgin Mary, and even the pagan name used to describe Isis—*Stella Maris*, or “Star of the Sea”—was adopted by Christians to describe the Lord’s mother. Then, in 1854, the church officially made the Immaculate Conception part of its dogma. In 1950, the dogma of Mary’s Assumption into heaven was proclaimed. Carl Jung believed that the Assumption of Mary was especially heartening and hoped it foreshadowed the return of the Grail energies to modern times. In 1997, formal efforts were underway to give Mary an even more profound role. There were signs that Pope John Paul II was moving to pronounce Mary a coredeemer equal to Jesus. That would make Catholicism one of the few religions with a female and a male godhead. Such a momentous event would be a redemption of the church itself and a positive indication that it is truly adopting a more universal, Hermetic view of spirituality, and some believe it would change the alchemy of the planet. “If the Holy Father would define this dogma,” said the orthodox nun Mother Angelica on her popular television show, “it would save the world from great catastrophes and loosen God’s mercy even more upon the world.”

Nonetheless, the Hermes Conspiracy continues in ways far less blatant than those used by the church in the Middle Ages. The reaction to appearances of Hermes by the news media and our government has been mishandled at both extremes—from sensationalism to secrecy. The reactionary handling of the Hermes spirit permeates all levels of our society.

“The old tradition maintains that true learning does not take place unless Hermes is present,” notes Robert Bly in *Iron John*. “That is depressing, because university English departments, and sociology departments, and religion departments usually get rid of teachers with Hermes energy first. The whole Ph.D. system was created by Germanic Hermes-killers. Hermes is magical, detail-loving, obscene, dancelike, goofy, and not on a career track.”

A more insidious reaction can be seen in the works of a number of modern authors who make a living spreading paranoia aimed at the general public. In their work, they present the opposite view of the Hermes Conspiracy—that the White Brotherhood, the Illuminati, the Freemasons, and dozens of other spiritual organizations are conspiring to take over the world through plots to murder those in power or destroy the economy. They portray their urge toward spiritual perfection as a will to power over others, and, like the church, reinterpret the Hermetic symbols in terms of devil worship. “They worship the worm Ouroboros, the God of Light, the orchestrator of the apocalypse, Lucifer,” said the Reverend Charles Finney in one of the first “exposés” of Freemasonry. Much of this hysteria is based on the subtle way the American founding fathers interlaced Hermetic concepts with their vision of true democracy, a philosophy that sensationalist authors have renamed the “New World Order.”

The Promise of Hermetic America

Despite the efforts of the orthodox religions to suppress Hermes’ ideas, a Hermetic revival was in full swing in Europe by the time of the American Revolution. Esoteric Freemasonry, descended from the Knights Templars tradition, played an important role in the establishment of our republic. Of the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence, fifty were members of the Masonic Order, and, according to that group’s official dogma, the Emerald Tablet is the single key to all forms of enlightenment. Benjamin Franklin, our emissary to the world, was a true believer in spiritual alchemy, and George Washington, also a Mason, openly supported the doctrines of the Illuminati, a German group formed in 1776 in Bavaria and dedicated to

spreading knowledge of the Hermetic Mysteries. Intentionally or not, our founding fathers incorporated the philosophy of the Emerald Tablet into the very foundations of the new commonwealth.

The thrice-greatest incarnation of America is in the three branches of our government (judiciary, executive, and legislative). The nation's motto, *E Pluribus Unum*, which means "One out of Many" (not "Order of One"), refers not only to the creation of the nation from the colonies but also to the ancient Hermetic dictum "All is One" that points to one supreme God above all others—the ouroboric presence that contains everything, both the beginning and the end. The eye in the triangle of light in the nation's seal, printed on the back of all one-dollar bills, is the eye of God's One Mind through which the initiate sees during the revelation of the vertical axis of reality. The truncated pyramid is symbolic of the loss of the ancient wisdom, the loss of the golden or emerald capstone which now exists only in the mind of the seeker. According to many esotericists, this unique capstone attracted the cosmic forces of Fermentation and directed them to the inner chamber of the pyramid during Egyptian initiation ceremonies.

The scroll underneath the Great Seal reads *Novus Ordo Seclorum* (which translates as "New Order of the Ages" not "New World Order"), marked the end of the Piscean Age and the beginning of the revelatory Age of Aquarius, in which America would play a decisive role. At Valley Forge, the father of our country had a prophetic vision of the future of America and the crucial role it would have in bringing forth a spiritual culture on the planet, but he was also warned against the "devices of small, artful, enterprising minorities to control or change government." There are many puritanical leaders who still wish to establish a patriarchal church government in America. According to the Rev. Jerry Falwell, the separation of church and state "was an idea invented by the Devil to keep Christians from running their own country." "The Supreme Court is an institution damned by God," echoed the Rev. Jimmy Swaggart. "In a state where the majority of people are Catholic," said the Jesuit leader Civiltà Cattolica, "the Church will require that legal existence be denied to religious minorities, [who] shall have a *de facto* existence without opportunity to spread their unbeliefs."⁴

The fundamental principle of strict separation of church and state in the new country was based as much on tolerance for competing religious

viewpoints as it was the recognition that none of the existing European religions offered a Hermetic view of the universe. Heaven and hell were static to them, and there was no identifiable process for perfection or transformation. All the old religions portrayed the same anthropomorphic God who somehow personally directed each moment of a person's life. The supreme, Hermetic God, as Mind, was a much more abstract presence that was only directly involved at the beginning and end of all things but could be accessed by purified humans raising themselves up to the divine level. Benjamin Franklin went so far as to write a liturgy for a new Hermetic religion and sent a copy to the great French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who expressed his admiration. As it turned out, the new American religion was a true, living alchemy of the people, for the people, and by the people. Jungian scholar Dr. Stephan Hoeller sums it up admirably in his book *Freedom: Alchemy for a Voluntary Society*:

The chief inspirer of the American republic was not Moses or Jesus, and even less Saint Augustine or Saint Thomas Aquinas, but rather Hermes Trismegistus. Hermes, who survived among the alchemists, magicians, Rosicrucians, esoteric Freemasons and the French enlightenment philosophers, crossed the Atlantic on his winged sandals and stood with his caduceus in the first assemblies of the Continental Congress. The hermetic principle, more than any other, came to permeate not only American government but the entire history of the United States. The Hermetic vision of existence declares that life is a process, not a fixed condition. Because of this, life cannot be managed but rather must be permitted to function. In this vision, government is like a master of the alchemical art, who guards and oversees the process, but does not interfere with it. If citizens are free to move about, to keep their earnings, to take up trades and professions and engage in business as they choose, the process works. Thus, politically, religiously, socially, and economically, the existing forces, rather like the alchemical Salt, Sulfur, and Mercury, freely interact with each other. The result is growth, transformation, and the unfolding of countless, latent potentials of a beneficent nature. The guiding principle of this process is not the petty, obsessive, and tyrannical Old Testament God, but rather Hermes, shepherd of the forces of being, the facilitator and wise alchemical transformer of all things.⁵

The backlash against the American dream originated in a fundamentalist wing of the Christian church that arrived in America before the Pilgrims. Known as Puritans, they were a radical Protestant reform movement that began in England in the 1560s. After encountering increasing rejection of their ideas in England, many of them migrated to America in the hopes of establishing a church government here. First settling in Virginia in 1607 and then Massachusetts in 1630, the Puritans followed the strict teachings of John Calvin, whose Old Testament God was unforgiving and vengeful. The patriarchal blueprint of Puritanism was obvious from the beginning. People were imprisoned for such crimes as dancing or kissing in public, branded with a scarlet letter indicating their transgressions, publicly humiliated by being shackled in pillories, or burned at the stake as witches. The Calvinists saw themselves as the Chosen People, predestined to inflict the will of their God on everyone. In their theocratic government, only the highest church fathers had any real power. Believing that material good fortune was God's way of empowering them, they became hard working, extremely materialistic, and ruthlessly ambitious. From this foundation grew not only the American work ethic but also the Moral Majority.

“The principal features of Hermetic America and Puritan America,” says Dr. Hoeller, “have differences which are portentous and still very much with us. A profound and seemingly irreconcilable conflict rends the soul of America in two. While in some subtle way, this conflict may also be envisioned as an alchemical process, it is still incumbent upon those who perceive the Hermetic heritage of this country to try to defend it and save it from being engulfed by its opposite. Only by recalling and supporting the Hermetic qualities of the American vision will the beneficent alchemical operation envisioned by the founders be permitted to do its work. Hermetic America contains the remedy for the ills that have befallen us in this age. The remedy is freedom. With freedom, the alchemy of the spirit corrects the flaws of culture and rectifies the excesses of civilization.”

Prophecies of the Alchemists

The philosophy revealed by Thoth, carried forward by Akhenaten and Balinas, and expressed in the founding of America, taught that there exists a vertical connection to the cosmos through which the true seeker can pass and witness the thoughts of the divine mind becoming reality. Having seen how to change reality by traveling to its source in the Above, the initiate returns to the physical world and participates in the creation of the universe according to the divine plan, which is to make the Above and Below One, to make all matter conscious, to make all darkness light. It was what Akhenaten called “living in truth,” and the cosmic code book containing the formula for doing that is the Emerald Tablet.

However, the saturnic forces of darkness deny anything higher than themselves, resist change, and therefore seek to control everything. Those who are invested with worldly power believe the universe should never change, and they see consciousness and knowledge as tools that can only be used to maintain the status quo. Their motto throughout history has been “whoever controls the truth, controls the masses” and their justification is always materialistic. For them, altered states of consciousness are a threat. Individuals, even those who have conquered their own egos, are forbidden to enter the Hermes Field under the auspices of the superego of a society in which freedom of consciousness is denied. But there are universal principles at work that go beyond human whims, and if we deny Hermes, he comes back with a vengeance in frightening yet enlightening borderline events designed to force all of society to change its way of thinking. The universe is a living process in which mankind can play an active part, and if he does not, there is no use for his consciousness. The alchemists recognized this and were careful to keep their motives pure and their worldly greed in check else their beloved Stone were to become a powerful nemesis they named the Rejected Stone.

We must be doing something wrong, for the Rejected Stone is all around us. Since World War II, the number of paranormal encounters throughout the world has risen exponentially, and in that same period, our mechanistic Newtonian universe has fallen and been replaced with surrealistic quantum visions that no commoner can grasp. Even the rational basis of mathematics, the queen of the sciences, has been shown to be an inconsistent illusion. Our diseases seem to punish us for overindulgences, and their mercurial agents quickly alter their properties to elude us. We have built up a matter-grabbing

industrialized society that is using resources faster than the planet can replace them, while the spiritual essences of our people are being ignored. Taken as a whole, our religious and educational institutions have hardly risen to the task but only reflect the same materialistic values. As history attests, the self-proclaimed representatives of God on this planet have been responsible for more death, pain, and loss of property than any number of military leaders.



The Rejected Stone is everywhere to be found. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfurt 1617)

Must a planetary Calcination take place to cleanse our planet of its hundreds of ego nations? Must planetary Dissolution be repeated but this

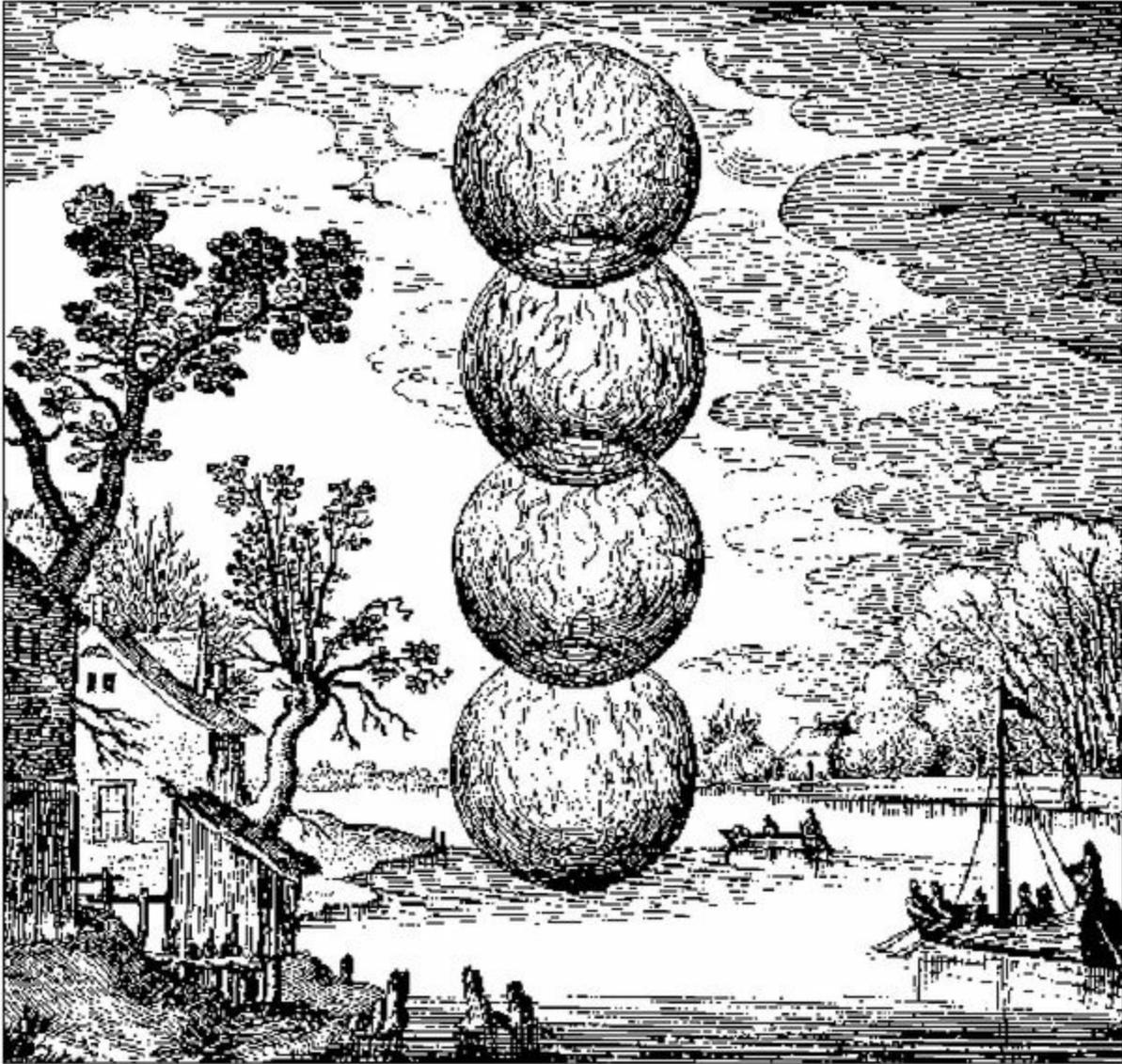
time with a Great Flood from the unconscious? Will we begin our Separation from illusion and our Conjunction of new beliefs in time to move on, or will Fermentation begin without us? Will the intrusion of paranormal realities destroy our feeble consciousness before it takes form under our own control? The imaginal realm is a potent independent force in our world that demands recognition. An individual or society, psychology or religion, that holds it at bay, that denies its presence, is bound to suffer at its hands. It will eventually break through, and it will speak to us in unintelligible whispers, take the form of gods or angels, or appear to us as shimmering phantasms or alien creatures standing at the foot of our beds. Psychology has shown that you cannot reject a part of yourself without it coming back at you, becoming a “shadow” that follows you everywhere you go. In fact, one of the terms alchemists used to describe the Rejected Stone was the *Umbra Horrenda*, the “Horrendous Shadow.”

Many religious descriptions of apocalyptic events can be interpreted in terms of the appearance of the Rejected Stone or even the complete opening of the gates that hold back the forces of chaos. Golden Dawn magician Aleister Crowley considered himself to be the reincarnation of alchemist Edward Kelly, whose Conjunction experience we examined in chapter 6. Crowley alleged that he had contacted the same Enochian angels that Kelly and Dr. John Dee had worked with and learned the so-called Apocalypse Working Ritual that the angels will complete to open the Four Watchtower Gates and begin the Apocalypse of St. John. In 1909, Crowley performed this ritual himself and believes he was able to crack open the Watchtower Gates enough to release some of the chaos into the world. However, in reading the descriptions of the Apocalypse from Crowley and Dee and even the Bible, it appears to be more an unleashing of the *Umbra Horrenda* in psychological and spiritual terms than a physical upheaval. Perhaps, like Crowley, we are the real workers of our own apocalypse; perhaps we are the ones who perform the Apocalypse Working Ritual without even realizing it and initiate the devastating process of Putrefaction.

By all indications, planetary Putrefaction has already begun. The earth is failing in her duty to “nurse” the child of the Sun and Moon, and loss of personal self-esteem is the curse of our society. Many modern ills—drug addiction, eating disorders, learning problems, neurotic behavior, crime and violence, the high rate of suicide—all result from loss of respect for

individual essences that transcend time and space. As Hermes prophesized in *The Perfect Discourse in Asclepius*:

In that day men will be weary of life, and they will cease to think the world worthy of reverent wonder and of worship. This whole good thing, that which nothing was or is or will be deemed better, will be threatened with destruction; men will think it a burden, and will come to scorn it. They will no longer love this world around us, this incomparable work of God, this glorious structure, this sum of good made up of things of many diverse forms. Darkness will be preferred to light, and death will be thought more profitable than life; no one will raise his eyes to heaven; the pious will be deemed insane, and the impious wise; the madman will be thought brave, and the wickedest will be regarded as good. Only the evil angels [archetypes] will remain, who will mingle with men, and drive the poor wretches by main force into all manner of reckless crime, into wars and robberies and frauds, and all things hostile to the nature of the soul. Then will the earth no longer stand unshaken, and the sea will no more be navigable; heaven will not support the stars in their orbits, nor will the stars pursue their constant course in heaven; the voice of the gods will of necessity be silenced and dumb; the fruits of the earth will rot; the soil will turn barren, and the very air will sicken in sullen stagnation.



The hidden fires of alchemy continue to burn, whether or not we are aware of it. (Michael Maier, Atalanta Fugiens, Frankfurt 1617)

In that same treatise, Hermes explains that in Egypt “all the operations of the powers which rule and work in heaven above have been transferred down to earth below,” and in another of his prophecies, Hermes links Putrefaction to changes taking place in the land of the pharaohs:

Our land is the temple of the world; but, as wise men should foresee all things, you should know that a time is coming when it will seem that the Egyptians have by an unfailing piety served God in vain. For when strangers shall possess this kingdom, religion will be neglected and laws made against

piety and divine worship, with punishment on those who favor it. Then this holy seat will be full of idolatry, idols' temples, and dead men's tombs. O Egypt, Egypt, there shall remain of your religion but vague stories which posterity will refuse to believe, and words graven in stone recounting your piety. Some barbarous neighbor shall dwell in Egypt. Their Divinity shall reascend into heaven; and Egypt shall be a desert, widowed of men and gods.⁶

As authors Graham Hancock and Robert Bauval have demonstrated, Egypt is very much a part of our millennial transformation. Using precise measurements, they have linked the Sphinx at Giza with the cosmic Age of Leo. Such astrological epochs are determined by an astronomical phenomenon caused by the slow wobble of the earth on its axis. Known as the precession of the equinoxes, it is the time it takes an imaginary line drawn from the north pole to complete a circle in the heavens. It is estimated that this precessional line takes about 26,000 years to pass through all twelve signs of the Zodiac. This cosmic horoscope indicates the highest spiritual forces at work on the entire planet. The Age of Leo, which ended approximately 10,000 years ago, corresponds to the Putrefaction process in which life on the planet was dominated by superior forces of utter destruction that resulted in a state of luxuriant fertility. This was the era of the Great Flood and the Sphinx, and, some say, when the Emerald Tablet first appeared on the planet. The alchemy of the planet continued until the present Age of Pisces, which is marked spiritually by introspection and self-sacrifice. This is the era of Balinas and Jesus and represents planetary Dissolution. The coming Age of Aquarius, which may have already begun, will be a time of vision and tolerance that the alchemists connected with the final operation of Coagulation. Carl Jung estimated that this era of Hermes would begin sometime between 1997 and 2200, and scientists at the French Institute for Geophysics have predicted the actual astronomical passage will occur in 2010, remarkably close to the 2012 date which marks the end of the ancient Mayan calendar. In the *Zoroastrian Oracles*, written in the sixth century before Christ, we find an ancient confirmation of the same hidden precession of earth's axis that determines the planet's horoscope. The writings describe the final stages of the alchemy of creation and how it will unfold on earth in four periods of about 3,000 years each. We are living in the end times of the

third such period, as the final epoch begins to unfold on earth before we leave the planet entirely and travel on to the stellar realm.

Unfortunately for us, the transitions between cosmic epochs are notoriously disruptive. The apocryphal prophecies of Enoch, who according to legend is really Hermes in another of his disguises, describe a violent period of destruction that will even the score for our mishandling of the mystical and Hermetic revelations granted us. The French alchemist Michel de Notredame (1503-1566), better known as Nostradamus, also detailed much chaos and destruction during our transition into the next millennium. Even the great alchemist Paracelsus saw the difficult times ahead: "At present the palm is given to debauchery, until one third part of mankind or of the population of the whole world shall be killed, another shall be finished off by disease, and the remaining third only shall be saved and survive." This all sounds like the waves of planetary holocaust predicted by so many modern psychics, though in the minds of indigenous people everywhere, it is just the planet shaking us off after raping her for the glory of our technology. As we look at the spiritually-charged monuments of the pyramids, Stonehenge, sacred moundworks, and medicine wheels, one cannot help but wonder what our civilization's legacy will be after the oft-foretold "Technocalypse." Towering skeletal skyscrapers once filled with power-hungry people dedicated only to moving money around? Great ribbons of asphalt that criss-cross the land like so much graffiti? A million lost golf balls?

Will we really fail so miserably? Whether it was an incarnation of Hermes, an alien intelligence, or the Supreme Being who gave us the Emerald Tablet, its author saw the possibility of perfecting the life force on this planet. "Its inherent Strength is perfected," he tells us, "if it is turned into Earth." On our journey in from the stars, on the Planetary Ladder through Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars, to our Conjunction on Earth, we are now ready to proceed into the higher phase of our alchemy, which is beyond the Moon to Venus, Mercury, and the Sun. After the coming Putrefaction, Nostradamus saw a Fermentation of amazing spiritual development: "The body without a soul is no longer at the sacrifice. At the day of death it comes to rebirth. The divine spirit will make the soul rejoice seeing the eternity of the World." In envisioning the final Coagulation, the alchemist wrote: "The divine Word will give to the substance which contains heaven and earth, occult gold in the mystic act. Body, soul, and spirit are all-powerful. Everything is beneath his

feet, as at the seat of heaven.”⁷

Psychonaut Terence McKenna believes we will return to the stars together, as a species. He heard this from the mouth of Hermes himself, which for McKenna is the *Psilocybe Cubensis* mushroom, a true entheogen or independent intelligence that he believes is actively promoting human evolution. In a recent interview, McKenna described a prophetic encounter he had with this Hermetic ally in which the mushroom deity said clearly: “When a species prepares to depart for the stars, the planet will be shaken to its core.” McKenna elaborated: “All evolution has pushed for this moment and there is no going back. What lies ahead is a dimension of such freedom and transcendence, that once in place, the idea of returning to the womb will be preposterous. We will live in the imagination.”⁸

Perhaps, like the tragic members of Heaven’s Gate, we all sense that our home is really in the stars. In his translation of the sacred Egyptian text *Rebel in the Soul*, Bika Reed discusses the notion of suicide, which is what the ancient author of the papyrus is contemplating. Like the Heaven’s Gate participants, he sees this act as a sacrifice of body for spirit. “He wanted his soul to participate in this destructive act,” notes Reed, “because he knows that only in union with his soul can his spiritual essence rise from the ashes like the Phoenix. This Phoenix will be his Heir. The concept of Heir, one of the main themes of Egyptian mythology, is central to the papyrus. The Heir is the final result of human genesis: a spiritual, indestructible form of life in which the soul is exalted. The image of this blissful state is haunting this desperate mind. The man understands that despair is blocking the way to his spiritual evolution. Unable to overcome this despair, he tries to shortcut it.”⁹ But the suicidal shortcut is a shortcut in the processes of alchemy too. We can go through Calcination and Dissolution repeatedly, through all eternity if need be, but we will never survive the transition intact without achieving the Stone of Coagulation.

Hermes has some stirring advice for all of us entering these transitional times: “Stop and become sober: perceive with the eyes of your heart again! And if all of you cannot do this, then at least let those who are able to do so. For the wickedness of ignorance floods the whole world, destroys the soul which is locked in the body and prevents it from completing its journey and docking into the port of the stars.”

[1](#) Sources for the other information presented in this section are Tim Leedom, ed., *The Book Your Church Doesn't Want You to Read* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall-Hunt Publishing, 1993); Barbara Walker, *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (Edison, New Jersey: Castle Books, 1996); Peter Partner, *The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and Their Myth* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1993); and Michael Howard, *The Occult Conspiracy* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1989).

[2](#) The *Corpus Hermeticum* consists of seventeen documents of ancient origin but was not generally known until the 1300s. The only existing evidence for their antiquity comes from a few Greek manuscripts dating from Ptolemaic Egypt which are very similar in content. In 1614, Protestant scholar Isaac Casaubon published his *De Rubus Sacris et Ecclesiasticis Exercitationes XVI*, which declared that the Greek style of writing in the *Corpus* dated from the second and third centuries. Though his findings were rejected by many scholars of his time, his pronouncement eventually became the accepted verdict. The German cleric quoted is Daniel Colberg from *Das Platonisch-Hermetisches Christenthum* (Frankfort, 1690).

[3](#) Matthew Fox explains his concept of Creation Spirituality in *Original Blessing* and *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988).

[4](#) The source for the quotations from religious fundamentalists in this paragraph is Tim Leedom, editor, *The Book Your Church Doesn't Want You to Read* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1993).

[5](#) From Stephan Hoeller, *Freedom: Alchemy for a Voluntary Society* (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 1992). Dr. Hoeller graduated from the University of Innsbruck in Austria and is now professor of comparative religions at the College of Oriental Studies in Los Angeles, California.

[6](#) S. Rappoport, "The Prophecy of Hermes Trismegistus," *History of Egypt from 330 B.C. to the Present Time, Volume II* (London, 1904).

[7](#) The first quatrain is CII-Q12 and the second is CIII-Q2 from the predictions of Nostradamus. See Erika Cheetham, *Nostradamus: The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* (New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1990) and John Hogue, *Nostradamus: The Complete Prophecies* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1997).

[8](#) From an interview with Terence McKenna in *Omni* magazine (May 1993).

[9](#) From *Rebel in the Soul: A Sacred Text of Ancient Egypt*, translated by Bika Reed (New York: Inner Traditions Int'l, 1978).



Chapter 24

HAVE YOU SEEN THE STONE?

Secret Lore of the Emerald Grail

The symbol of the Grail has captured the imagination of generations, even though its physical form has never been fully agreed upon. Legends describe it variously as a cup, cauldron, bowl, bottle, dish, plaque, stone, or gemstone. While it always carries some kind of sacred force, it is usually pictured as a commonplace physical object. Modern versions of the story are derived from Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, which he completed in 1469, but that work was based on French texts written hundreds of years earlier. The legend developed independently in Indochina, the Middle East, and in the Germanic and Celtic lands and became a powerful source of inspiration for modern poets like Alfred Lord Tennyson and T. S. Eliot. All the stories describe the Grail as furnishing spiritual and sometimes palatable nourishment and suggest that whatever the Grail represents, there is no more noble act than to spend your whole life searching for it, even if you never find it.

The basic storyline concerns a miraculous vessel of some type that is kept on a mountaintop in a netherworld at the edge of the physical and spiritual realms. The Grail Castle is protected by subtle obstacles that foil all but a chosen few. The Grail's protector is the monklike Fisher King, who is hovering between life and death from a wound to his thigh or genital area. In an application of the dictum "As Above, So Below," the Fisher King's once lush and prosperous country has deteriorated along with him and become a barren wasteland. T. S. Eliot duplicated the Fisher King's milieu for modern readers in his five-part poem *The Waste Land* (1922), in which the modern city is used as a symbol of psychic paralysis. The contemporary wasteland is an image of spiritual drought in which the despair of man's soul desperately searching for refreshment is contrasted with failed traditional sources of

myths, literature, and religions, which are really just unassimilated fragments of a larger, more ancient tradition that is no longer available to us. This is indicated by the poem's lapse into an irrelevant cacophony of foreign languages whenever it seems like true redemption is forthcoming. The lost tradition is the Hermetic Mysteries, which through centuries of subversion has been stripped of all but a microscopic portion of its former splendor. Only in the densely packed lines of the Emerald Tablet does that tradition survive on all the levels on which it was originally intended.

Just like the legend of the Knights Templars, who were sworn to retrieve the "living" Emerald Tablet and integrate it into society, so it is the duty of the Knights of the Round Table to embark on a dangerous quest to find the ephemeral castle and restore the Fisher King, as well as to release the powers of the Grail for the benefit of all mankind. The knights undergo many psychological and physical challenges in their search for the Grail and are often guided by Hermes-like wizards who appear out of nowhere in the darkest parts of forests. Several knights come close to finding the spiritual treasure, but only the purest among them finally succeed. Lancelot, who has had an illicit love affair with his king's queen, is momentarily blinded by the Grail's light before it disappears before him. Gawain makes it to the Grail Castle but fails to gain entry because of his materialistic nature. Perceval, the simple fool, fails on his first attempt to grasp the Grail, but, after spending five years in the wilderness, returns to succeed on his second attempt. The three who eventually find their way into the presence of the Grail are the humble and down-to-earth Bors, the soulful Perceval, and the ascetic, chaste Galahad. What they seem to have in common are their lack of ego and freedom from attachment to material possessions. In their differences we can discern the three realms of Hermes—the physical, psychological, and spiritual levels of reality.

Inside the ghostly edifice, the three men find the Fisher King, who cannot be healed until the question "Whom does the Grail serve?" is correctly answered. The inferred answer, "the king," has meaning on several levels. The Grail question occurs naturally when we confront the miraculous One Thing for the first time, and the king is the part of us affected most by this confrontation, since he represents the highest part of ourselves, society, and the universe. "Is this for me?" we ask. But the Grail never serves ego; ego serves it. As soon as the answer is realized, the suffering Fisher King, who

has been kept hanging on far beyond his normal life span, is finally allowed to die. Upon his death, his kingdom is restored with flowing water, fresh greenery, and new life. As their reward, the three knights are allowed to take the Grail to a holy city in the East, where their final Grail initiation takes place. During the ceremony, the purest of the knights, Galahad, dematerializes in front of the others, leaving behind only an “odor of sanctity.” Perceval journeys back to the Grail Castle to become its new king, and Bors returns to Camelot to relate their wondrous adventures to King Arthur.¹

The story of the Grail is also the story of the suppression of the Hermetic Mysteries. While it is generally accepted by scholars that the origin of the Grail story lies in pagan fertility rites or Celtic myth, there is mounting evidence that the real inspiration was early legends about the tablet in which it was called the “Emerald Herald,” because of the good news it carried for mankind. The word “grail,” originally written “graal,” is derived from the French word for bowl, and the tablet was sometimes referred to as a bowl or cup because it was seen as a reservoir of knowledge, a cauldron of inspiration. The iridescent object was even said to contain an actual sample of an elixir that provided unlimited spiritual nourishment. This is the meaning of the “Cup of Hermes” which was described in the *Corpus Hermeticum*: “God filled a mighty Cup with Mind and sent it down and His Herald proclaimed: ‘Baptize yourself with this Cup’s liquid, and whatsoever heart can do so will ascend to Him that has sent down the Cup. Those that do will know for what purpose they came into being.’ As many then as understood the Herald’s tidings and bathed themselves in the One Mind, became partakers of the Knowledge; and when they had received the Mind they were made perfect men. But they who do not understand the tidings, these, since they possess the aid of Reason only and not the One Mind, are ignorant wherefor and whereby they came into being.”

Apollonius of Tyana certainly partook of that mighty vessel and was referring to the Emerald Tablet when he said he had drunk from the “Cup of Tantalus,” the mythic cup containing the nectar of the gods that was stolen by Tantalus from Mount Olympus. In some Latin translations, the text of the tablet is actually laid out to resemble a chalice, and the medieval guardians of the Grail, the Knights Templars, named the Grail the “Emerald Cup.” In

some legends, the Grail is born from a large emerald that fell from the sky, while in other versions, the giant emerald fell off the crown of Lucifer during the war of the angels. In still others, Seth, the son of Adam and Eve, finds the Emerald Grail in the Garden of Eden and offers it as a sign that God has not forsaken mankind altogether. This is the same Seth who, according to another legend, wrote the Emerald Tablet. In addition, the stories about Perceval refer to an ancient relic or shrine that was “green as grass.” The emerald was known in antiquity as the Stone of Hermes, and in ecclesiastical symbolism, green is the color of the *anima mundi*, the cosmic axis of the world soul along which the Emerald Tablet is oriented. Moreover, the revealer of the Grail history in the Perceval tales is Hermes Trismegistus, disguised as the hermit Trevizrent, whose name means “the Threefold Knower.” Those same legends also speak of three Grail keepers and three tables on which the Grail materializes. Thus the Grail itself is also thrice greatest. In the remaining versions, Hermes is none other than Merlin, the Celtic avatar and guide between worlds, who speaks of the “threefold death” required to reach perfection.

In the earliest Semitic versions of the story, the Grail is actually a stone tablet, a gift from the gods. In fact, the Cathars in France always referred to the Grail as the “Green Stone.” Subsequent versions of the legend refer to it as a green gemstone or a crystal plate, and it was not until the early thirteenth century in Robert de Boron’s *Joseph d’Arimathie ou Le Saint Graal* that it was associated with the cup of the Last Supper brought back from the Holy Land by Joseph of Arimathea. Even at that time, German versions of the story were describing the Grail as a magical stone, the *Lapis Exilis* or “slender stone” that fell from Above. There are often direct alchemical references in these stories, such as Book IX of *Parzifal*, where Wolfram von Eschenbach writes: “By the power of the Graal Stone, the Phoenix burns to ashes, but those ashes give life again.” In all these interpretations, the Grail-Stone provides unlimited spiritual nourishment and rejuvenation, the identical qualities attributed to the original Emerald Tablet.²

The fact that the Grail is a commonplace object that exists in both material and spiritual reality makes it a perfect synonym for the One Thing of the Emerald Tablet or the Stone of the alchemists. As the *Vas Hermeticum*, the Hermetic Vase or Womb of Hermes, the Grail is the source of heavenly

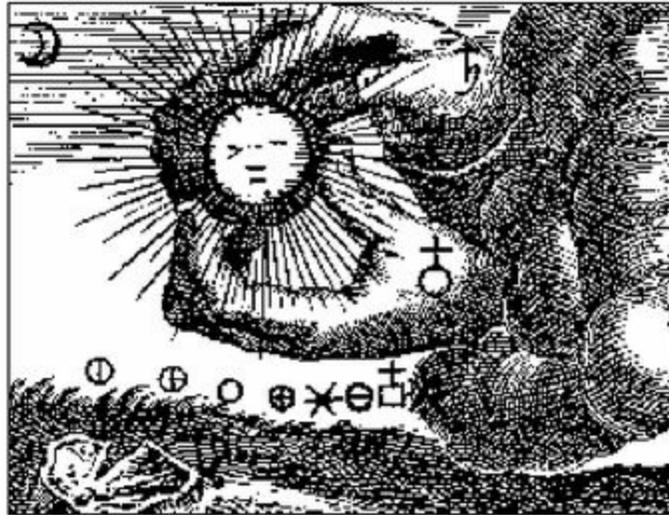
inspiration and spiritual food for those seeking enlightenment. Images such as bowls, cups, and cauldrons are all feminine mystery symbols. Moreover, the vertical orientation in both systems is identical. The Emerald Tablet speaks of the causal relationship between the powers of the Above and the Below, which are depicted in the Grail stories in the relationship between the king's health and the well-being of his kingdom. The mysterious tablet, like the Grail Castle, never appears to base souls but remains hidden in the light of the heavenly Sun until the arrival of the purified magical hero.

Personal Encounters with the Stone

Just as trying to understand the true nature of the Grail is difficult for modern people, so is the most difficult concept in the Emerald Tablet the true nature of the One Thing. The idea that a spiritual force can have physical reality violates all that we have been taught about the separation of mind and matter. The alchemists emphasized the physicality of the One Thing by referring to it as the First Matter. They visualized the “alpha” state of the First Matter as a chaotic darkness or described it in symbols such as a lump of coal. The perfected or “omega” state of the First Matter was seen as a rainbow of colors and symbolized as a brilliant diamond. However, we have dealt with many symbols of the First Matter throughout this book, and perhaps it is time to examine the testimony of people who, for one reason or another, actually witnessed the ethereal substance in its purest form. My own encounter with the One Thing was part of my Fermentation experience discussed in chapter 15. At first I thought I was the only person in the world who had experienced such a thing, but before long I realized there were many others who had seen what I saw. One man put it this way: “When I was a boy, I saw trees not only with ordinary perception but was held in trance by them. There was something *between* me and them; something of them in me, perhaps something of me in them. The present moment opened. As a growing boy I lived in mystic participation with nature.”³

In children's drawings and nursery tales of fairies traveling in globes of light and genies materializing from various containers, I found other

similarities, and I began to wonder if only children could see what I had seen. William Wordsworth's poem *Intimations of Immortality* took on special significance. The formations of nature, "appareled in celestial light," which he saw as a child were lost to him in adulthood. "It is not now as it hath been of yore," he wrote. "Turn wheresoever I may, by day or night, the things which I have seen I now can see no more."



The One Thing inside matter is revealed by the hand of God. (Goosen van Vreeswyck, De Groene Leeuw, Amsterdam 1674)

The more I read the accounts of others, the more I realized that mystics throughout the ages have experienced something that can only be fully appreciated in terms of the primordial substance which I glimpsed. In his *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Paramhansa Yogananda reported that after meditating for hours, he often experienced a ball of white light that suddenly differentiated into all colors of the rainbow. The guru described it as a "central immense globe of brilliancy." At other times, "the unifying light alternated with materializations of form, the metamorphoses revealing the law of cause and effect in creation."

Zoroaster, the sixth-century B.C.E. Persian mystic, wrote: "Know, O my Friend, that the essence of the Self-Existent is One, and without limits or conditions. Whatsoever is on earth is the reflection and the shadow of something that is in the spiritual World Sphere. Being is like light; and light becometh visible in the Resplendent Thing. While that Resplendent Thing remaineth in its native condition, it is well also with its shadow. Again, that

Resplendent Thing is the shadow of something still more resplendent than itself.”⁴ That Resplendent Thing was seen by mystics throughout the ages. After “the heavens were opened and a blinding light of exceptional brilliance flowed through my entire brain,” the twelfth-century German mystic Hildegard of Bingen became one with this One Thing. “I, the fiery life of divine essence,” she wrote in *Scivias* (Rupertsberg, 1151), “am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows. I gleam in the waters, and I burn in the sun, moon, and stars.”

Occasionally, people in more everyday walks of life experienced the hidden presence. Most witnesses encountered it when they were at their lowest points, when their egos were nearly wiped away by circumstances beyond their control. One young woman, devastated by the death of her father, described her experience in an autobiography: “Entering a small room into which I had moved to be near my mother, I one day found it dominated by a light of intense brilliance, alive and concentrated to a vaguely spherical form. It appeared only once, but left a sense of positive energy at hand as a support through the years that immediately followed.”⁵

After pondering the deeper questions of life and death, a college girl experienced a similar unfolding of reality:

At first I experienced great fear. Something invisible, yet momentous, was happening in the room, which all of a sudden seemed to be filled with light—a whitish, yet warm, light. It seemed to be both in the room and within me. Although “it” was obviously outside me, it was also part of me; yet a part with no physical location. It was united completely with a region of my mind. The curious thing is that I *felt* the light. I continued to see the room quite clearly, but all the objects were lit up by this interior light. I wanted to worship the force which was manifesting itself in such an inexpressible way. Sometimes during the experience I had a thought, which, like the light, I *felt*. “Thirty, forty, seventy years are nothing,” I thought. “Only when you are united with this force does life really begin.” The experience ended with an indescribable feeling of strength, certainty, and great serenity.⁶

Though I felt comforted to know others had experienced the same thing, nothing made any sense to me until two decades after my experience. While exploring the hinter regions of the university library in Vienna, Austria, I discovered several velum-bound alchemy books on a high shelf. In those

dusty and forgotten manuscripts, I found descriptions and actual drawings of the First Matter, a normally invisible substance, which sometimes materialized in alchemists' laboratories. The First Matter had all the characteristics of what I had glimpsed as a boy. What is more, the alchemists were expecting it. They knew how to accumulate and work with it because of a revelation known as the Emerald Tablet.

The Emerging Pattern

In the years since my experience, I have collected hundreds of similar cases, and there can be no doubt that their frequency is increasing. One of the most fruitful of these types of encounters occurred in January 1987. While competing in a hot-air balloon race high above the Austrian Alps, Lynnclaire Dennis lost consciousness when her balloon suddenly rose to an altitude of over 12,000 feet. Her husband and a third member of the crew were able to keep coherent long enough to set the balloon on a gradual descent and start life support on Lynnclaire, but before the balloon headed downwards, it had risen to 17,000 feet. Her brain and body starved for oxygen, Lynnclaire had an unusually revealing near-death experience. Hovering over her dying body and watching the men work on her, Lynnclaire seemed still under the influence of the balloon's vertical maneuvering, for her Second Body soon entered the vertical axis of reality. There she was shown a very pure image of the alchemical Stone. After she recovered, she knew she had seen something very important but was unable to recall all the details. Finally, after a four-year pursuit of her "personal Grail," she had a dream in which a guide appeared and returned with her to the vertical axis of reality and showed her the Pattern she had glimpsed during the balloon accident. At 3:00 A.M. on Valentines Day 1991, Lynnclaire jumped out of bed to find a piece of paper and immediately drew what had been revealed to her.

"The first thing I drew was empty space," she recalled, "a window of four diamonds floating in the Void. This Void then birthed the Sphere, the feminine, passive polestar of the evolving Pattern. Next came four vacuous crescents, a quad of crowns wreathing the single circle that served to take that

which was still explicit in its formlessness to yet a fuller state of emptiness. Then, when an unbroken single line encompassed all the pieces, the vacuum was filled, the context defined, yet the connection incomplete. Only when the rainbowlike strands of light and love were correctly woven did the fragments meld, and the whole—the Pattern—emerge. There were eight hearts, four squares, one circle, the numbers three and eight, and upright and inverted pyramids.”⁷

The alchemical symbols uniting Fire and Water and the numerology of Lynnclaire’s vision are both components witnessed by increasing numbers throughout the world. The Pattern described by Lynnclaire Dennis is the same Pattern of which Hermes spoke, and it is part of the sacred geometry of the Emerald Tablet. Renowned University of Chicago mathematician Dr. Louis Kauffman, who developed a formula to describe the Pattern, says the curve determining the fluid shape starts “thrice greatest” as a Trefoil Knot, which physicists working on the Unified Field Theory believe is the simplest form of connection between energy and matter. Like the octagon-embedded object that appeared in my own Fermentation experience and in the visions of hundreds of others in the last fifty years, the basic geometry of the Pattern is eightfold. In her efforts to discover the meaning of the Pattern she had seen, Lynnclaire confirmed this underlying geometry with the dozens of scientists and a wide variety of spiritualists she contacted. One of these was a highly respected priest and teacher of the ancient Hawaiian Huna religion, but when Lynnclaire traveled to Hawaii to meet with him, he would allow her to ask only one question. She decided to ask him what was the meaning of the number eight, since the number was represented sixteen times in the Pattern and seemed to be an integral part of the phenomenon. The *kahuna* told her that eight was the key to all and had to do with the stars. When she explained to him what she had seen, he confided in her that the Pattern was known to Hawaiians as *Kaha’ewalui’a’aokalani*, or the “Life Force of Eight.” This force originated from a cluster of stars known as the “Seven Sisters”—what astronomers call the constellation of Pleiades. Lynnclaire’s Pattern is completed by an unbroken line surrounding all twelve pieces of her vision that creates within it “seven bridges.” In striking similarity to Hermes’ teaching that beyond the Seven Steps is an unseen eighth, the *kahuna* explained that there was a hidden eighth star in the Pleiades group.

Remarkably, the Dogons of Africa, the Australian Aborigines, and a few other indigenous tribes believe the same thing about this particular group of stars.

In technological societies too, people are experiencing the One Thing, the sacred ground of being, by sensing its basic eightfoldness. Most of the time people know that something more is going on than just ordinary dreams or fanciful visions. For instance, in April 1996, a woman in Sioux City, Iowa, started having a recurring dream that forced her to seek the help of a psychologist. In her dream, she enters her backyard on a sunny afternoon and gazes into the peaceful, clear water in her octagonal, above-ground swimming pool. Suddenly, all the plywood sides of the pool and liner collapse at the same time, but the water in the pool maintains its octagonal shape and stands there all by itself. For some reason, the uncanny image profoundly disturbed the middle-aged woman, who was terrified at being let in on some “hidden reality” going on right under her nose.

That the Stone is right under our noses is a basic tenet of alchemy. This sacred object, said the Italian alchemist Cesare Riviera in 1605, “does not appear to base and impure souls, but remains hidden in the celestial spheres of the inaccessible light of the heavenly Sun. It shows itself on to the happy magical hero, who alone gloriously possesses it, enjoying the salvic Tree of Life, located in the middle of this universe.” In *Philosophiae Naturalis Metallorum* (Natural Philosophy of Metals, Guyenne, 1550), the French alchemist Denis Zacheire revealed: “Our body, which is our occult Stone, cannot be seen or known without inspiration, and without this body our science is in vain.”

The Octave of Creation

The octagenic “Stone” of the alchemists being glimpsed by modern people is part of the fundamental matrix of reality described in the Emerald Tablet and represents an archetypal template from which diverse modern mystical and religious symbols have emerged. How did the ancients view the Stone? The Egyptian Octad, or eight qualities of creation, were worshipped in

the temples of Hermopolis, where Thoth was regarded as the head of the Group of Eight and was responsible for enabling them to come into existence. Thoth is also credited with inventing the musical octave and embedding it in the mathematics of the universe. The sacred name of Hermopolis, *Khemenu*, means the “City of Eight,” and is possibly the origin of our word “alchemy.” According to the ancient Egyptian papyri, the ultimate act of creation was the Eighth, which returned directly to the One: “I am the One that transforms into Two; I am the Two that transforms into Four; I am the Four that transforms into Eight; After this am I One again.” We now recognize this ancient sequence as the dance of life itself. In the division of every human cell, a process known as mitosis takes place that involves a sequence of the Seven Steps of Transformation resulting in an equal dividing of genetic material, and in the Eighth Step, the creation of a new cell.⁸

In ancient Chinese cosmology, the Great Flood was caused by the powers of Eight, and it became known as the Holy Number. Chinese philosophers also spoke of the Eight Winds of Creation and tied them to the eight trigrams of the *I Ching* from which all possible combinations of reality can be derived. These forces were alternatively expressed as the Eight Pillars that held up the canopy of heaven and the Eight Gates of the rains. Many Tibetan mandalas are geometric patterns generated by the number eight, and the popular system of *Feng Shui* is based on the octagon. Chinese alchemy produced the Eight Immortals, who together symbolize the properties of the Elixir. Like the Eight Precious Items of Confucius, Buddhism has its Eightfold Way, yoga its Eightfold Path, Sufism its Eight Sentences of the Path of Junayd, and Christianity the Eight Beatitudes of Christian service given by Christ in his Sermon on the Mount. The guidelines of modern worship are still filtered through the Egyptian Group of Eight. We find the same hidden Octad in the eight-spoked Wheel of Dharma and throughout the life of Buddha. Born on April 8 or May 8, 560 B.C.E., his birth was attended by eight priests, and after Buddha died on December 8, 480 B.C.E. at the age of 80, his ashes were divided into eight portions and given to eight tribal chiefs. In other Eastern religions, the Octad is represented in the 108 names of the goddess or in all the 88,000 chakras in human body.

The supreme Babylonian god hid in a darkened room on the eighth floor of their temples. In the Mithraic mysteries, there exists an unspoken Eighth

Gate known as the “Mountain of Transubstantiation” that leads to a luminous realm beyond the seven major gates of initiation. According to Muslim belief, there are seven hells and eight heavens, which can be seen in the eightfold layout of gardens and books in Iran and Muslim India. The magnificent octagonal Tower of the Winds built by the Athenians is another example of the Eight Winds that determine total reality, and the final act in the Eleusinian Mysteries came on the sacred eighth day. The horse of the god Wodan, who is considered the German counterpart of Hermes, has eight legs, and in other cultures around the world, an eight-legged horse carries shamans on their journey to the Other Side. Eight-spoked medicine wheels are how Native Americans mark sacred places of outdoor worship.

In Judaism, the Feast of the Tabernacles is on the eighth day. Eight people were saved from the Flood, and the archetypal city Jerusalem has eight gates, although the Bible speaks of a “New Jerusalem” that is the perfected Stone of the alchemists. In Christianity, the eighth day of the Passion is when Christ’s resurrection took place, an event known as the Eighth Day of Creation. This sacred geometry is incorporated into octagonal pulpits, fountains, baptismal fonts, and in church architecture. “Eight are the temple’s walls,” wrote the Bishop of Milan (St. Ambrose) in *De Bono Mortis* (*On the Goodness of Death*, 380 C.E.). “Oh number worthy of holy actions performed at the spot! Eight are the walls of the font, mystical shape that covers the rites of the Water—rites for the saving of man—mystical number of Eight.”

Early Christian theologians taught that there were seven levels to heaven, but the highest was with God on the eighth. The Gnostics also believed in a God of eight parts—four pairs of opposing qualities. In the Near East, the fertility goddess Ishtar was symbolized by an eight-pointed star, which in early Christianity was appropriated to represent the Virgin Mary. In the Catholic alpine nations, her symbol, even today, is the white, eight-pointed Edelweiss flower.

If we look into the metamathematics of the number eight, we see more auspicious signs of its sacred power. Gernot of Rechtersberg, medieval German philosopher, said: “Eight, as the first perfect cube [2^3], imprints us in body and soul with the security of eternal beatitude.” The Greeks knew that the square of any odd number above one is a multiple of eight plus one, thus

confirming in esoteric math the Egyptian Octad plus Thoth. Architecturally, the octagon serves as the transition from the square to the circle, which was its same function in the alchemical Squaring of the Circle, and connotes the transition from the earthly to the heavenly, the rational to the irrational. The numerical name of the Devil is Thrice Greatest Six (666), while that of Jesus is Thrice Greatest Eight (888), yet the two numbers are related. The octahedron is a three-dimensional figure with eight planes that resembles a diamond shape (or two pyramids joined at their bases), but when the octahedron is projected into two-dimensional space, it is seen as a six-sided figure, the hexagon.

Eight is considered an auspicious number even in modern times. In depth psychology, eight is the number of individuation, it represents the wholeness of the personality, and it is generally considered a number of good fortune. On August 8, 1988, there was a remarkably high number of marriages in many countries, and so many people played numbers containing eight that some lotteries refused to take any more bets that day. It was also the date of a powerful Harmonic Convergence on the planet in which tens of thousands of people took time to gather in positive meditation. Harmony itself is an expression of the musical octave, which shows itself even in the smallest unit of matter. It is now known that every atom strives to combine with other atoms in patterns that will give it a complete component of eight electrons in its outermost shell. In today's Periodic Table of Elements, all known elements are arranged according to their atomic weights and naturally fall into eight categories of similar properties, and all of material reality is expressed in just seven rows of eight elements.

The Octad keeps recurring in our reality because it is a fundamental archetype on all levels of creation. Physically, psychologically, and spiritually, the number Eight drives the hidden processes of transformation. The secret Eighth was a basic component of Hermetic doctrine since the beginning and has been openly incorporated into a number of esoteric disciplines. The spiritual Work founded by Russian Georg Gurdjieff centers around his Law of Octaves. The octave is indeed the basic vibration of the whole universe, from the music of the spheres to the music that resonated below in human beings. On the average, the voices of men, women, and children vary from one another in whole octaves, and much of the phenomena around us can be interpreted in terms of the vibrations of the

seven tones of the musical scale. Alternatively, Gurdjieff called his rule the “Law of Seven” and recognized that the universal Seven Steps of Transformation always result in a new level of creation that is the Eighth. The Eighth step is a second beginning, sometimes even a Second Body, organized on a higher level (or Octave) that represents the fulfillment of what the previous Seven Steps had prepared.

Could the One Thing of the Emerald Tablet be expressing itself in an emerging pattern as we approach a New Age? The apocryphal Gnostic texts from Nag Hammadi speak of these coming changes: “Recognize what is in front of you, and what is hidden from you will be revealed to you, for there is nothing that will not be made manifest.” Some New Age groups, such as the Beyonders and the Tetoem Faith, would have us believe that only people who experience the Hermetic Pattern will survive the coming changes, and other groups are even arming themselves for the dark times ahead, thereby aligning themselves with the very forces of darkness they seek to avoid. These changes in the human spirit affect all of us but must begin with each of us individually. In other words, they must take place on both the macrocosm and microcosm of our planet, both in our species and in individuals at the same time. As always, the Work begins in the Below. “For I am sown in all things,” says the Gnostic text quoted above, “and wherever you will, you can gather me, but when you gather me, you gather yourself.”

In another Gnostic treatise, *Discourse on the Eighth*, Hermes Trismegistus offers to guide us from the Seventh Sphere, the last of Seven Steps in the physical realm, to the Eighth realm beyond words. “How shall I describe the Universe? I am Mind and can see Mind, that which moves the soul! I see the One that moves me from my forgetfulness. You give me power! I see myself! I want to speak! Fear restrains me. I have found the beginning of the power that is above all powers, the One that has no beginning. I see a Fountain bubbling with life. I have said, Oh my son, that I am Mind. I have seen! Language is not able to reveal this. For, the entire Eighth, Oh my son, and the souls that are in it, and the angels, sing a hymn in silence. And I, Mind, understand.”

1 The first pagan versions of the Grail legend are represented by the sixth-century Celtic poem *The Spoils of Annwn* (The Spoils of the Otherworld) by Taliesin and the twelfth-century *Life of Merlin* by Geoffrey of Monmouth. *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach was later transformed

by the church to include Christian references, which can also be seen in the twelfth-century *Quete du Saint Graal* and *Perceval Le Conte du Graal* by Chretien de Troyes. However, it was not until approximately 1215 that the connection with Joseph of Arimathea was openly stated in *Joseph d'Arimathie ou Le Saint Graal* by Robert de Boron. That tradition continued in *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485) by Sir Thomas Malory and *Idylls of the King* (1875) by Alfred Lord Tennyson.

[2](#) The sources for this interpretation are John Matthews, *At the Tablet of the Grail* (London: Penguin Arkana, 1987); Julius Evola, *The Mystery of the Grail* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1997); Arthur Waite, *The Holy Grail* (New York: University Books, 1961); Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Grail Legend* (Boston, Massachusetts: Sigo Press, 1986). The last book presents an interesting theory on the origin of the Grail based on an incident in the life of Alexander the Great. A fascinating study of the gemstone-grail connection is contained in Flavia Anderson, *The Ancient Secret* (London: RILKO Books, 1987). A retelling of Adolf Hitler's search for the tablet/grail is presented in Howard Buechner, *Emerald Cup: Ark of Gold* (Louisiana: Thunderbird Press, 1994).

[3](#) From the Religious Experience Research Unit of Oxford University, case number 1155, as reprinted in J. M. Cohen and J. F. Phipps, *The Common Experience* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher Inc., 1979).

[4](#) The quote from Zoroaster is from *The Book of Shet the Prophet Zoroaster* contained in *The Desatir* as reprinted in G. de Purucker, *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy* (Covina, California: Theosophical University Press, 1947). Zoroastrianism was a pre-Islam religion that lasted over a thousand years. Zoroaster is also known by the names Zirtusht and Zarathustra.

[5](#) The young woman's story is from G. Rachel Levy, *The Phoenix' Nest*, reprinted in J. M. Cohen and J. F. Phipps, *The Common Experience* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher Inc., 1979).

[6](#) From the Religious Experience Research Unit of Oxford University, case number 1519, as reprinted in J. M. Cohen and J. F. Phipps, *The Common Experience* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher Inc., 1979).

[7](#) From Lynnclaire Dennis, *The Pattern* (Lower Lake, California: Integral Publishing, 1997).

[8](#) This section is based primarily on two excellent works on sacred

numerology: Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Michael Schneider, *A Beginner's Guide to Creating the Universe: Mathematical Archetypes of Nature, Art, and Science* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995).



Chapter 25 EMERALD INSIGHTS TO LIVE BY

Reclaiming Our Hermetic Legacy

Can we live in truth, as Akhenaten envisioned? Can we ever hope to retrieve Alexander's treasure? Can any of us experience the same light that ruled the lives of Buddha, Balinas, Jesus, and Mohammed? The answer to all these questions is a resounding YES, and the way to retrieve this divine legacy is given to us in the Emerald Tablet. However, if you see this enigmatic document as a gray piece of paper you are already on the wrong path. The Tablet of Hermes is a *living* green gem that glows whenever it comes alive. Where is this fabulous artifact? Under the paws of the Sphinx? In a secret chamber at Cheops? In the Hall of Records at Giza? Where can we find it? The Emerald Tablet is a living thing because it is carried by living things, and each of us carries the Emerald Tablet within us. There is no doubt that the Emerald Tablet was written by the hand of God; it is our divine Signature.

For the Emerald Tablet to lead us back to our divine legacy, it must once more come alive within us. The more people study and understand our ancient myths, visions of mystics, and archetypal images all around and inside us, the more they will piece together the big picture, because all that is available to us now are unassimilated fragments of an ancient tradition in which the Emerald Tablet flourished. How can we be initiated into those mysteries and make the tablet live and grow within us? Hermes told us that the way to personally verify these truths was contained in the Pattern of his tablet. That Pattern is the basis of the Hermetic Mysteries. Just imagine what it would be like to be initiated into those mysteries today.

Our first step is to find and enter the Outer Court of the Mysteries, which could be in a real temple or in the temple of our own bodies. Here we undergo purification so we can enter deeper into the Mysteries. These are the

Lesser Mysteries of the ancients, and they were taught in groups and sometimes even celebrated in public. The Emerald Tablet reveals that there are three steps or stages to these Lesser Mysteries. The first step is Calcination, a burning off of pretenses and unworkable belief systems that hinder our progress. That is followed by a descent into the dark waters of the unconscious during Dissolution to free us from unexamined compulsive or obsessive behavior. After analyzing the parts of our personalities, all that is inferior is cast out in Separation.

What is left after this Death of the Profane, our initiatory purification, is brought together in the fourth step, our Conjunction, which is a new belief system and union of opposing mental forces. The new harmony in our being is proof of the balancing and compatibility of the elements within. This stage marks the turning point in our everyday lives that leads to a true expression of our innermost being. We have completed the Lesser Mysteries and are allowed within the Inner Court of the temple. We are naked before a great Locked Gate; all we have with us is the Lesser Stone of our new Conjunction.

These first four steps—Calcination, Dissolution, Separation, and Conjunction—have taken place in the “real” world and are the basis for “exoteric” religions and modern psychological therapy. Yet, it is the strength of the Mysteries that they work in both the rational and the unrational realms.

During our Conjunction in the Inner Court, we have discovered traces of gold within us, and as the alchemists were always saying, it takes gold to make gold. But this inner gold must be sacrificed to the higher gods, and that begins with the next three steps that take place beyond the Locked Gate of the clockwork universe to the abstract dimension at the edge of time and space. This is the Holy of Holies in the temple, and our key is the True Imagination. The Holy of Holies is always a small room in the farthest reaches of the temple in which initiation continues on a one-on-one basis. It is here that the unspeakable is spoken. It is in this room that we discover that the Mysteries have something in common with modern quantum physics. Anyone who approaches these two disciplines intending to reduce them to a series of empirical statements will soon find himself stymied and frustrated. Simple linear thinking is not sufficient to understand these subjects. The inconsistencies and contradictions of both disciplines convince us on a real level that the whole process is not rational, that some elements of the formulae are transcendent—in fact, inexpressible. However, in the Hermetic

Mysteries, we can still work with those transcendent formulae if we actualize the like elements within ourselves. That is the meaning of the Doctrine of Correspondences. At this crucial stage, the initiate tries to leave his ego far behind and break free of transitory stereotypes to connect with the transcendent, archetypal basis of reality.

The first step in the Greater Mysteries that takes place in the Holy of Holies is the sacrifice of self in hopes of eliciting an infusion of pure Selfhood from the Above. This paradoxical step, which the alchemists saw as the two-stepped process of Putrefaction and Fermentation, is a combination of death and rebirth in which new life enters the destroyed remains of our identity, where everything has been refined away until only soul is exposed. This becomes our Quintessence, the true signature of each and every thing. In the Greater Mysteries—Fermentation, Distillation, and Coagulation—one works only with this Quintessence, which can also be viewed as our unborn Self. In the Holy of Holies, we attempt to perceive “the thing itself,” to read the signature of God within us, and discern in it the qualities that will determine and objectify our higher being.



Hermes, surrounded by a halo of piercing arrows, shows us the way to

penetrate illusion. (Zadith Senior, De Chemis Senioris, Strasbourg 1566)

The Great Secret revealed in the hermetically sealed Holy of Holies is that the archetypal powers, the gods and images which have guided above the mundane world, are not to be worshipped but transcended. The Holy of Holies is beyond good and evil, beyond the stereotypes and prototypes of the earth, the planets, and the stars. The goal is not to become one with the archetypal powers of genetics and astrology, but to understand them so deeply that we can finally break free of their influence. This is truly breaking the cycle of death and rebirth and being resurrected on a higher level, closer to the divine force itself that is free of mechanistic or archetypal influences of any kind. The alchemists called this process Distillation, the higher purification, the raising of consciousness beyond even what we previously conceived of as our “gods.” From this lofty position, we bond with the highest Presence in the cosmos and return to earth, carrying back a piece of the divine within us. The final step of Coagulation is a centering and acceptance of that transcendental Presence as the rightful ruler of our personality. We have completed Greater Mysteries and carry within us the Greater Stone, truly the Stone of the wise.

Our initiation is complete, and we are now adepts in the Hermetic Mysteries, in which our only duty is to spread the holy Presence we carry with us throughout the world of manifested things. We now see the Alchemy of Becoming all around us; we understand every work of creation because we can see the true Signature of each and every thing. We are “living in truth” within the Ouroboric River that is the Operation of the Sun. We have progressed to the Eighth Step outside the temple, beyond the Seven Steps of initiation, and the green light of the Emerald Tablet glows brightly within us. It is our body, our talisman, and our tabernacle. It is the shrine at which we worship and the throne from which we rule. It is the caduceus, the magic wand of Hermes which each of us carries with us everywhere.

In other words, in the alchemy of our personal transformation, the Seven Steps are themselves meant to be transcended and integrated into a single process built around the Emerald Formula of *Solve et Coagula* (Dissolve and Coagulate). This single guiding light is always with us, in life and in death, on all levels of reality. The whole point is that the Emerald Tablet is both a

Stone and a Light, both real and unreal, both particle and wave. It is a living Force.

One practical way to make the Emerald Formula live in us is to distill it even further, and make of it practical insights that we can use to rise above the trials and tribulations of everyday life. In working with the Emerald Formula on a daily basis, its precepts penetrate even deeper into the fiber of our lives and often work their wonders without us even being aware of it. The following seven principles capture the essence of each of the Seven Steps, but in deference to the profundity of the Hermetic Mysteries, we will label them neither “commandments” nor “insights” but “arcana,” the great secret ingredients of our transformation that come together to make the Stone.

Arcanum One:

Whatever remains Below becomes its own worst enemy.

In our ignorance, we are constantly messing up the alchemy of our lives and that of the planet. The opportunistic growth of ego, whether in a person or in a nation, gradually takes over the whole organism and becomes its Tyrant King, who keeps power through disinformation and subterfuge. Ego, on whatever level it manifests itself, saps us of energy and positions us opposite the divine. By living under ego and not essence, we are no longer living in truth and bring about our own demise. We lose innocence; our plans and goals become mockeries. Calcination, the hellfire reserved for those who go against the thoughts emanating from the One Mind, who live outside the Operation of the Sun, can take place on a personal, marital, social, national, planetary, or galactic level. Nothing will ever go right unless we are connected to the one source of all creation. The Rightful Ruler, the sacred Presence within each one of us, must overthrow this despot king. We must acknowledge the Presence beyond ego, for when it is coagulated and ruling our world, we, too, are divine, but when things are not going our way, we are experiencing the justice of Thoth himself. Jesus knew exactly what it meant to remain in the Below, and he expressed it in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas: “If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth can save you. If

you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.”

Arcanum Two:

The way to truth is through Intelligence of the Heart.

Arriving at a “solution” to any problem requires the suspension of previous assumptions and the discovery of new perspectives. However, one of the most basic and hardest assumptions to give up is the assumption that all problems can be solved rationally. Any thinking scientist or mathematician will tell you that reality is made up of both rational and irrational components. The only totally rational world exists inside computers, where reality is artificial and limited to preprogrammed parameters. As sentient beings, our only advantage is to live on the edge between “yes and no,” in the chaotic zone where only intuition knows the way. So, finding truth requires using our minds and following our hearts, which is why the alchemists sought to develop a feeling intellect. That is what they meant when they warned that the alchemist could transmute nothing until he had transmuted himself. At that point, the alchemist opens himself fully to feeling and experience. In fact, in some drawings, alchemists are shown burning or tearing up books to demonstrate that this is not static knowledge or dogma but a living, experiential gnosis brought about by inner Dissolution of artificial structures.

Arcanum Three:

Every created thing carries the signature of its creator.

Nature is a book from which the wisdom of the divine can be read, because when mind acts on matter, it imposes its essence or truest nature on it. By recognizing the divine Signature of a thing, we can understand the

connection between the Above and the Below through which it was manifested. Each thing has its own signature, the archetypal essence that can be identified by its similar expressions. By contemplating the relationship between the objects in our lives and the forces that created them, we can arrive at the “thing itself” and know its inherent identity. Only in this way can we understand what these objects or forces mean to us and whether they represent threats or assistance. This application of the Doctrine of Correspondences is fundamental, and by ignoring these congruencies between the Above and the Below we are holding back the wisdom of the universe.

The alchemists became very familiar with the signatures of metals, and we have seen how the physical properties of metals became associated with an individual’s temperament. The alchemists saw that the metals carried the signatures of the planets, just as we carry the signatures of the metals. The same principle was adapted in Paracelsian medicine, in which the signatures of plants determine how they can be used to cure people. Balinas believed that the esoteric signatures of gemstones could also be used to heal. Such alchemical therapies work on both a subtle and a gross level at once, by working with the hidden signatures of things. As we have seen throughout this book, words and images have signatures too, and even religions have their own signature based on how they came into being. By the same token, the God whom people worship places his Signature on their minds. By learning to recognize signatures through the alchemical operation of Separation, we can work with the higher alchemy and perhaps learn to write a few signatures ourselves.

Arcanum Four:

Continued enlightenment comes from living within the Operation of the Sun.

True enlightenment cannot come from earthbound philosophies. We must find a source higher than ourselves, and for the Egyptians and Hermeticists of all ages, that source was symbolized by the sun. This is not primitive sun

worship but a genuine regard for the greater alchemy expressed in the Operation of the Sun. Whether it is seen as the governor of dark and light or the revealer of Cosmic Ages, the Operation of the Sun demonstrates the Ouroboros—the Fountain of Fountains or Möbius River—the seemingly endless creation of light and energy feeding off the One Thing. We can each of us live the same way, if we tap into the hidden and inexhaustible reserves of our nuclear Self created during the alchemical Conjunction. To achieve that, of course, requires peeling away all the leaden layers of falseness that have grown over it in the course of our lives and withdrawing the carbon rods of control placed there by ego. This ouroboric reaction within us is an amazing and unbelievably powerful source of pure, living energy. Many experience the waves of this energy as lasting enthusiasm, or what mythologist Joseph Campbell recognized as bliss. “I feel if one follows what I call one’s bliss,” he said, “the thing that really gets you deep in the gut and that you feel is your life—doors will open. They do!”¹

If you follow the Operation of the Sun, which is alchemy, something amazing will begin to unfold in your life. Truly amazing synchronicities will occur at the intersection of the individual mind with the One Mind.

Arcanum Five:

The gateway to the Above is through the True Imagination.

The True Imagination exists on the fine line between real and unreal, manifested and unmanifested. Where do you draw the line at what is real? Imagination? Your dreams? Your thoughts? Psychology—is that real? Should we accept the view of quantum physicists that matter itself is an illusion? According to the alchemists, *everything* is real. Everything we perceive is all part of the same One Thing, and we are as connected to it as we want to be. As the Gateway to the Above, the True Imagination is connected to the physical reality of the One Thing through the archetypes and to the glorified realm of the One Mind through the light of consciousness. When these two forces of the Above and Below come together, anything can happen. Many people have experienced this power at the borderline between

sleeping and waking, or between death and life. At such times, we realize that Mind is a real place, where the only light is imagination. One ten-year-old boy, who had a near-death experience, described it as “walking inside your mind.”

Using the True Imagination, we enter the Greater Mysteries that begin with personal Fermentation in which we experience an influx of meaningful insight and higher inspiration. It is with the True Imagination that we first perceive the Stone. What is the True Imagination? It is the fusion of our mind with the One Mind, the passionate union of self and divine beyond all egocentric fantasy. This combination affects the very fabric of our existence, creating a gravity of likely events that brings image to fruition.

Arcanum Six:

Your feelings and thoughts are the feelings and thoughts of the Whole Universe.

As a kind of corollary to the Doctrine of Correspondences, the ancients believed that just as the thoughts of the One Mind—what we would call the Word of God—created the universe, so can the thoughts and words of an individual change his or her reality Below. In other words, consciousness is a force in nature. As we approach the millennium, more and more people are realizing this simple truth once again. Meditation groups are at work throughout the world in an effort to raise the “vibrations” of our planet and repair some of the damage caused by centuries of thoughtless negativity. We must remember that each of us is a copy of the universe. “Understand that you are a second little world,” said the Alexandrian scholar Origen, “and that the sun and moon are within you, and also the stars.” We are ourselves the living Word of the cosmos, and we embody the sulfuric will and mercurial imagination that materialize the Salt of our existence. And if we can clear ourselves of all the falsity, fantasy, and ignorance around us, if we can return to our most innocent essences, we too can work the miracles of Hermes.

How can a mortal work miracles? We all work miracles all the time without even being aware of it. All of us are incarnations of Hermes and are

constantly either creating lead or gold in our lives. Our thoughts have creative repercussions which produce results we do not expect—that is the signature of the metal mercury and why it can be both a medicine and a poison. There is no way of escaping the power of Thoth, the God of Thought. If we deny it, it will hide from us according to our command. In alchemy, justice means we create our own reality. Only by going through Distillation can we gain the objective perspective necessary to change our personal reality according to our conscious desires.

Arcanum Seven:

The Stone is a purified consciousness that remains intact on all levels of reality.

As Hermes never tires of telling us, over and over, over and over: the One Thing and the One Mind are One. He means that mind and body, Soul and Spirit, male and female, positive and negative, Above and Below, are all One. All sexes, all races, all species, all life is One. All life, all death; all heroes, all villains; all angels, all demons; all gods, all devils are One. Unless you find the One Presence within you, you cannot escape the illusory theater of duality, even for an instant. The message of the Ouroboros, “All is One,” is the basis of the alchemical principle of changing one thing into another. Alchemical transformation would not be possible unless everything were really One.

Rosicrucian alchemists sometimes referred to the Stone as the “Telesma,” which meant a self-perfecting physical presence similar to our modern idea of the genetics behind nature or evolution. By working with the Telesma, the alchemists hoped to speed up the process of our species’ evolution, to truly participate in the work of nature, to affect it and transform it, making of it not an evolutionary phenomenon but a revolutionary happening within one’s own lifetime. The Stone is an emerging pattern that resulted from the tireless work of the alchemists in past millennia. It is our true legacy, a gift to each of us from each of them. Balinas even included it in his will. We can make of it a true presence within us or we can throw it away. The choice is ours, but if we

do not accept it as our salvation, all is truly lost. In her article “Annals of the Invisible College,” published in *Lapis* magazine (October 1995), author Joscelyn Godwin offered a penetrating summary of the creation of the Stone during the final Coagulation in alchemy:

There is nothing left of most people’s souls once they have been filtered through the planetary spheres. The vast majority will be extinguished as personalities soon after death, then perhaps recycled as different people. The adept’s ambition is to survive this general Dissolution, and if he should incarnate again, to do so only through deliberate choice, not through bondage like everyone else. In order to pass beyond the boundaries of the cosmos, symbolized by the starry sphere, and enter consciously into another mode of existence, the adept must have forged, during life, a “radiant body” as a vehicle for this individuality. Knowing of this hyper-esoteric stream makes it easier to understand alchemy. The forging of the radiant body goes in parallel with the chemical events, and its completion is marked by the appearance of the Philosopher’s Stone.

An Emerald Tablet for the Twenty-first Century

How would the Emerald Tablet read if it were written today? First of all, we would have to gear it toward an audience without much time for any background philosophizing, and of course, we would be competing with television for their attention. Then again, we would have to at least acknowledge the “advances” made in scientific knowledge. Contemporary science tells us that the universe is made up of energy, matter, and light. Those would be what the alchemists called Sulfur, Salt, and Mercury, respectively. According to Einstein’s equation ($E = mc^2$), energy and matter can be transformed into one another through the intermediary of light. In alchemy, Sulfur and Salt are transformed into one another through the intermediary of Mercury. Thus, if that little “c” in Einstein’s equation really stood for “consciousness” instead of “light,” there would be no difference at all between physics and alchemy. Let’s just assume that consciousness is light after all. In that case, an Emerald Tablet for the twenty-first century

would look something like this:

THE EMERALD NEWS RELEASE

Truly, without hype, religious exploitation, or commercial consideration, you can experience Higher Truths.

You are as much a part of the Material as you are of the Mental; and you are as much a part of the Mental as you are of the Material, in order to accomplish the miracles of Light. And just as all things come from Light, through the concentration of Consciousness, so do all created things originate from Light, through the transformation of Thought.

Its father is Energy; its mother Matter; the Spectrum carries it in its belly; its nurse is the earth. It is the origin of All, the consecration of the Universe. Its inherent strength is perfected, if it is materialized.

Separate Matter from Imagination, the Subtle from the Gross, gently, in deepest Meditation. The Light rises from the earth to Heaven, and returns again to the earth, thereby containing within itself the powers of both the Mental and the Material.

Thus will you obtain the Light of the Whole Universe. All Darkness will be illuminated to you. This is the greatest Force of all powers, because it overcomes every Mental thing and penetrates every Material thing.

In this way was the Universe created. From this comes many wondrous Manifestations, because this is the Formula.

Therefore, this deals with all three parts of reality and shows the underlying relationship between Energy, Matter, and Light. Herein is completely explained the Fountain of Consciousness.

Of course not everyone believes science has all the answers, and we are living in the midst of two cultures, one of science and the other of religion. Some religious leaders accused the alchemists of losing sight of God, just as they have accused modern scientists of the same thing. In truth, both disciplines denied many “gods” for the advancement of knowledge. The scientists gave up appealing to God in favor of the scientific method. The alchemists rid themselves of the lesser gods of ego, dogma, and unyielding archetypes that imprison all of us, so they could move *closer* to God. More than in any other movement in history, truly more so than in any religion or science of our times, the alchemists never took their eyes from the true God, the One who is All. The Seven Steps of the Great Work, therefore, might best

be summarized in a more solemn form than a news release. Maybe the Emerald Tablet for the twenty-first century should be a prayer:

THE ALCHEMIST'S PRAYER

Oh, most singular and unspeakable Presence, first and last in the universe, heighten the fury of my fire and burn away the dross of my being. Cleanse my soiled soul; bathe me in your awesome light. Set me free from my history and cut me loose from my boundaries. Unite me with the One Thing hidden in my life, wherein is my only strength. Fill me with your Presence, allow me to see through your singular Eye, grant me entry to your Mind, let me resonate with your Will. Make me transparent to your flame, and fashion me into a lens for your light only. Transmute me into an incorruptible Stone in your eternal service, like the golden light that surrounds you.

This is the One True God of the alchemists. It is a God of matter, light, and energy that is as much at home in a church as in a laboratory. Yet, in today's cynical and materialistic world, where even religion is tied to earthly concerns, it is difficult enough to practice the Emerald Formula and even harder to believe the visions of the mystical alchemists without experiencing them directly. Read the Emerald Tablet with an open heart; find the words to make it come alive for you, and Hermes will come to you as a faithful guide. And if that is beyond you then at least keep an open mind; keep the door open a crack and give yourself and others the chance to change. That tolerant attitude, which is part of the American dream, was expressed four hundred years before the Declaration of Independence by the British philosopher Richard Rolle de Hampole: "Some have declared that it lies within our choice to gaze continually upon a world of equal or even greater wonder and beauty. It is said by these that the experiments of the alchemists are, in fact, related not to the transmutation of metals, but to the transmutation of the entire universe. This method, or art, or science, or whatever we choose to call it, is simply concerned to restore the delights of the primal paradise; to enable men, if they will, to inhabit a world of joy and splendor. It is perhaps possible that there is such an experiment, and that there are some who have made it."²

¹ From Joseph Campbell, *An Open Life* (Burdett, New York: Larson Publications, 1988).

² From Richard Rolle de Hampole, *Emendatio Vitae* (The Mending of Life, London, 1330).



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