

Alchemy and the process of Transformation

Why alchemy? The study of alchemy, both physical and spiritual has been around for almost 3000 years. It has been practiced by every major religious tradition and in every major “culture” on the planet. It is a language that transcends languages. The process of physical alchemy has led to modern chemistry and medicine. Newton was an alchemist!!! Let me say up front in case you are worried, I am not an alchemist, but I do believe that it can offer us insights into the process of being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Yes, there were those who used alchemy to try to physically transform metals into gold and that is its reputation. Pictures, paintings and diagrams of alchemy are reflective of the scientific aspect because you can't really draw the spiritual one. Most alchemists were far more interested in perfecting the human body and soul and creating gold. Every aspect of alchemy has a psycho-spiritual counterpart.

Carl Jung based most of his psychology on alchemy. Two of his 14 volumes are solely about alchemy.

There are seven core stages of the alchemical process, I am outlining them below. I am not going to go into great detail because I prefer a discussion about the transformative process and seeing which of these aspects relate to your lives. Chemical alchemy is a linear process, you can't skip steps and end up with the same result. Spiritual alchemy is very different. We find ourselves at different parts of the process at different times in our lives and in different things we are or should be working on. The vast majority of us do not get overly far in the process because we are stuck and alchemy gives some ideas of processes that can get us unstuck if we choose.

Another difference between chemical and spiritual alchemy is the notion of choice. Chemicals do not choose what to do. You mix the same chemicals together in the same way, you will get the same result. The variables are limited. In the human psyche and soul, the variables are almost infinite, controlling everything is not possible, but we do have choices and part of the process is owning the process we choose and its outcomes.

The refiner's fire is a significant biblical symbol for many and heat and fire are at the core of the process of alchemy.

A few biblical verses that could be alchemical in nature:

[**Proverbs 27:21**](#) The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and a man is tested by his praise.

[**Revelation 3:18**](#) I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

[**1 John 3:1-24**](#) See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ...

[**Psalms 12:6**](#) The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.

[**Isaiah 60:17**](#) Instead of bronze I will bring gold, and instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron. I will make your overseers peace and your taskmasters righteousness.

[**Genesis 2:7**](#) Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

[**John 2:1-21:25**](#) On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ...

[**Mark 9:49**](#) For everyone will be salted with fire.

[**Numbers 6:1-9:23**](#) And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the

vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the Lord, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins. "All the days of his vow of separation, no razor shall touch his head. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the Lord, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of hair of his head grow long. ...

Exodus 32:19-20 And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it.

Ezekiel 22:19-22 Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have all become dross, therefore, behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As one gathers silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into a furnace, to blow the fire on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in my anger and in my wrath, and I will put you in and melt you. I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of my wrath, and you shall be melted in the midst of it. As silver is melted in a furnace, so you shall be melted in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the Lord; I have poured out my wrath upon you."

THE STAGES OF ALCHEMY—I have cut and pasted and added some of my own.

CALCINATION

Calcination is the destruction of ego and our attachments to material possessions. Calcination is usually a natural humbling process as we are gradually assaulted and overcome by the trials and tribulations of life, though it can be a deliberate surrender of our inherent hubris gained through a variety of spiritual disciplines that ignite the fire of introspection and self-evaluation. At times it takes a "fire" to break the attachment to things, people, and ideas we cling to. This fire can be found through interactions, prayer, meditation, or study. More often than not it is a sudden. The spiritual sense of fire comes from the work of the Holy Spirit and can be a bit overwhelming. Think of the disciples and the tongues of fire and how that transformed them in an instant.

DISSOLUTION

Dissolution represents a further breaking down of the artificial structures of the psyche by total immersion in the unconscious, non-rational, feminine or rejected

part of our minds. It is, for the most part, an unconscious process in which our conscious minds let go of control to allow the surfacing of buried material. It is opening the floodgates and generating new energy from the waters held back. Dissolution can be experienced as "flow," the bliss of being well-used and actively engaged in creative acts without traditional prejudices, personal hang-ups, or established hierarchy getting in the way. This is a dissolving stage, we let go and let God. We find ourselves immersed in God. Like the disciples we are at a place we don't want to leave. We feel safe, secure, completely attached to the spiritual, a moment of losing ourselves and in our lostness we are found.

SEPARATION

Separation is the rediscovery of our essence and the reclaiming of dream and visionary "gold" previously rejected by the masculine, rational part of our minds. It is, for the most part, a conscious process in which we review formerly hidden material and decide what to discard and what to reintegrate into our refined personality. Much of this shadowy material is things we are ashamed of or were taught to hide away by our parents, churches, and schooling. Separation is letting go of the self-inflicted restraints to our true nature, so we can shine through. We return from our dissolution to reality with a deeper understanding of what we are still clinging to but a desire to let go more fully. We start to seek ways of separating ourselves from that which keeps us from being whole. Our unconscious guides us through dreams, study and prayer/meditation. This can be a trap in that all humans are at some level delusional, we want to believe we see clearly, yet all have blind spots. A spiritual companion or director is almost critical in the process. All alchemists had "masters" they would check in with.

CONJUNCTION

Conjunction is empowerment of our true selves, the union of both the masculine and feminine sides of our personalities into a new belief system or an intuitive state of consciousness. The alchemists referred to it as the Lesser Stone, and after it is achieved, the adept is able to clearly discern what needs to be done to achieve lasting enlightenment, which is union with the Overself. Often, synchronicities begin to occur that confirm the alchemist is on the right track. We will talk more about this when we get to Jung, but this is the joining of all the forces within us, especially the anima and the animus, the feminine and masculine parts of our persona respectively. Theologically the Trinity is both masculine and feminine, but those are human traits we put on the Trinity. This stage is important because we can not truly see the totality of God unless we are

fully open and receptive to all possibilities. We tend to cling to a sense of self that traps us, keeps us from seeing beyond.

FERMENTATION

Fermentation is the process starts with the inspiration of spiritual power from Above that reanimates, energizes, and enlightens the alchemist. Out of the blackness of his Putrefaction comes the yellow Ferment, which appears like a golden wax flowing out of the foul matter of the Soul. Its arrival is announced by a brilliant display of colors and meaningful visions called the "Peacock's Tail." Fermentation can be achieved through various activities that include intense prayer, desire for mystical union, breakdown of the personality, transpersonal therapy, psychedelic drugs, and deep meditation. Fermentation is living inspiration from something totally beyond us. Spiritually this stage may take a while—we are fermenting into a fine wine. We know the work that needs to be done and are actively doing what is necessary to do it. The world opens up on all levels, our senses become more fully alive and aware of our surroundings, we respond more than react, discern more clearly and attune to the will of God more fully. Most physical fermentation happens in a closed system. While spiritually we are encouraged to go off for retreats, overall spiritual fermentation can't happen in a vacuum, it happens best in and through community. One person fermenting passes on parts of their fermentation to others. "Joined and knit together, the community grows together in Christ, to the full stature of Christ." Eph. 4.

DISTILLATION

Distillation is the agitation and sublimation of psychic forces is necessary to ensure that no impurities from the inflated ego or deeply submerged id are incorporated into the next and final stage. Personal Distillation consists of a variety of introspective techniques that raise the content of the psyche to the highest level possible, free from sentimentality and emotions, cut off even from one's personal identity. Distillation is the purification of the unborn Self to all that we truly are and can be. Few get to this stage, perhaps a few saints. We are aware of our unconscious and heed its voice. We attune to the voice of the Spirit and utilize our gifts fully. We deeply understand the human condition and although we have not personally been through all things, we understand all things—as Christ did. The last stages of egocentricity are erased.

COAGULATION

Coagulation is first sensed as a new confidence that is beyond all things, though many experience it as a Second Body of golden coalesced light, a permanent vehicle of consciousness that embodies the highest aspirations and evolution of mind. Coagulation incarnates and releases the Ultima Materia of the soul, the Astral Body, which the alchemists also referred to it as the Greater or Philosopher's Stone. Using this magical Stone, the alchemists believed they could exist on all levels of reality. At this stage we have become "perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." It is when we can truly and fully do what Christ calls us to--- move mountains, ask and it will be done---we transcend our human condition and live as both a fully physical and spiritual person at the same time, it is our created order that we spend a lifetime avoiding and seeking.

My personal view is that this process continues after death. I think God knows few if any will achieve the later stages in this life, but we need to believe it is possible and it is what we are called to.