

INTRODUCTION TO ALCHEMY

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What is alchemy? This is the first and most vital question to be answered before a study of the following pages should be undertaken. This question can be answered to the satisfaction of the inquiring mind, but all careless paging through any alchemy book will be to no avail. If the reader has no previous knowledge of alchemy and, moreover, no knowledge through conscientious study concerning mysticism, occultism, or related subjects, the answer to the above question will have little meaning. What, then, is alchemy? It is “the raising of vibrations.”

For this reason, it is wise not to attempt to experiment with the laboratory outlines that follow. These experiments are only for those who have spent considerable time in spagyric research and who have proven to themselves that an honest endeavor has prevailed and that this same endeavor still motivates their true search for the highest arcana, the *lapis philosophorum*. As all students of alchemical literature have come to realize that the exact process for the opus magnum has never been completely revealed in simple language or put into print, they will appreciate the fact that here is given a detailed description of the lesser circulation.

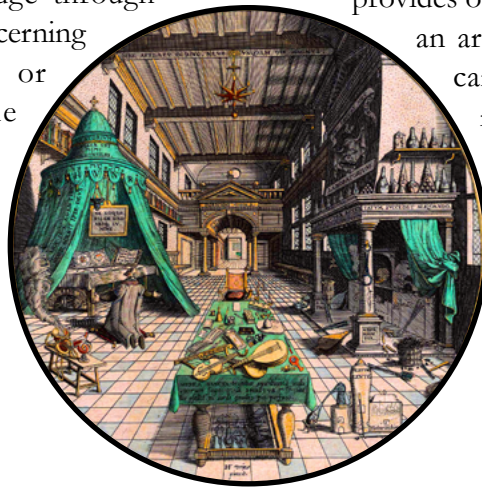
In alchemy there are the lesser and greater circulations. The former pertains to the herbal kingdom and the latter to the most coveted of them all, the mineral (metallic) realm. A correct understanding, and not

just knowledge, of the herbal process will open the gate to the great arcanum. Months and years of experimentation in your alchemical laboratory will prove the truth of this statement. The fact that alchemy is a life's work will be accepted by those who have spent months and years behind books and retorts. It is this significant fact which

provides our spagyric art with such an armor that no materialist can pierce it. If it were not for the cleansing, purging, and aging of the alchemist-to-be over a great length of time, like the *subjectum* they are working with, how could it be kept from the profane and the unworthy? Only that which has stood the test of fire has been purified. That there is still a cloak of secrecy covering alchemical processes,

and that this must yet remain so will have to be accepted by all aspiring alchemists. For personal greed has no place in alchemy. The aim of all true adepts is to help relieve a suffering humankind in its physical and spiritual misery. A non-acceptance of this excludes one automatically from the circle of adepts.

My friends in the medical professions, as well as the pharmaceutical chemists, will readily disagree with me when reading what follows. This must be taken for granted and, in fact, has been so since what is presented here is so foreign to the standardized teachings in present-day medical colleges. Since I agree with them, on their terms, it is only fair to ask that



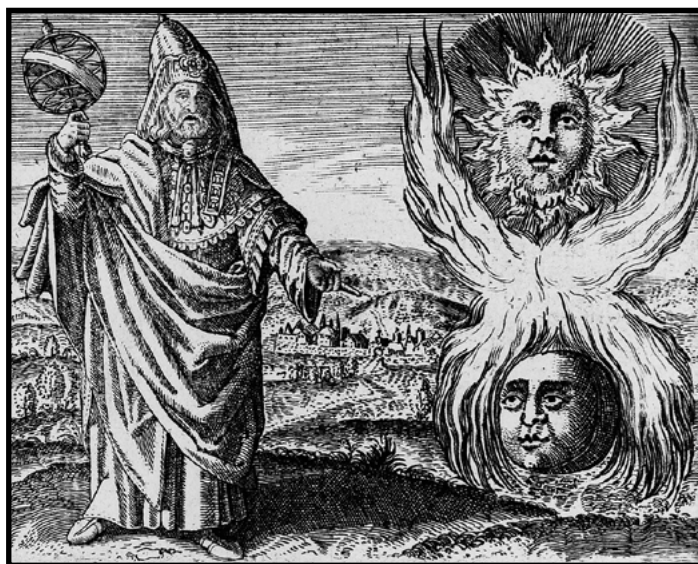
An image of an alchemist's laboratory, from Heinrich Khunrath's Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae, 1595.

they think of the contents of this article in the terms of an alchemist. If this is impossible, then the article should be laid aside for the time being and forgotten until it can be examined by an open mind free from prejudice.

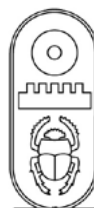
No attempt is being made here to write on allopathic therapeutics. This shall be left to those versed in this particular branch of healing. I am writing here about alchemy because of the years of studies and experiments that have preceded this book, and because of the work that shall in all likelihood continue to follow. Since the scope of alchemy is so immense, one earthly incarnation in many, if not most, cases is an insufficient time for the full completion of the work. In climbing the alchemist's ladder, there are many tribulations to consider involving time, money, heartaches—to mention only a few of the difficult steps. The aspirant then should think long and well before undertaking such an ordeal, for, if they are not prepared, all will prove unsuccessful.

The process in both the lesser and greater circulation is basically not expensive. In fact, it is relatively insignificant. But before this state can be reached much money, time, and effort can

and, most likely, will be spent. It is for these reasons that an urgent appeal is made not to venture rashly into alchemy, not to see oneself sitting in perfect personal health at the end of a rainbow with the world at one's feet and with full pots of glistening gold. These are only illusions and will prove to be but sensational and glamorous *fata morgana*; they will not satisfy the soul. There is more to be gained in alchemy than vainglory. This, in fact, cannot be obtained in alchemy. Such vainglory is as far from the true goals of alchemy as night is from day. This brings us back to the simple statement made at the beginning of this article: "Alchemy is the raising of the vibrations." The person who sees no meaning in this seemingly unimportant sentence has no right to attempt alchemical experimentation. Such a person is like one who claims that since they know all the letters of the alphabet they can, therefore, read any language as they are all composed of letters from the same alphabet. But do they read with understanding when the letters are interchanged, forming words in different languages? A chemist may know all the formulas and all the abbreviations of chemical terminology, but do they also understand what they really are? Their true origin? Their first state? This we



An illustration depicting Hermes Trismegistus in Symbola aureae mensae duodecim nationum, by Michael Maier, 1617.





*A detail of an illustration of an alchemist at work in Elias Ashmolé's
Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum, 1652.*

shall leave for those who are concerned to answer. If all the foregoing statements do not discourage the aspirant and make them put this article away with disgust, perhaps then it will help them to find themselves in this universe and to give peace and contentment to their soul. Hermetic philosophy, with its practical arcanum, repeats itself over and over again in the ancient axiom: "As above, so below. As below, so above."

It is questionable whether or not historical references to alchemists of the past have a place in these pages. There have been so many books published already that have made it their business to elaborate on the history and romance of alchemy. For this reason, no attempt is being made here to add to the wealth of biographical material supplied by such books. Our emphasis falls, rather, on present-day alchemystical experimentation, conducted in accordance with age-old practices. Our aim in these pages is to attempt to demonstrate and to reveal the truth of alchemy in contemporary language, while still remaining in harmony with ancient rules and rituals, according to the Alchemist's Oath. The practice of alchemy, not only in earlier times but in our own day as well, should be undertaken only with the greatest solemnity. This can best

be illustrated by the following oath from *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (London, 1652). This oath, in only slightly modified form, is still being used by present-day adepts:

Will you with me tomorrow be
content,
Faithfully to receive the blessed
Sacrament,
Upon this Oath that I shall heere
you give,
For ne Gold ne Silver as long as
you live,
Neither for love you beare towards
your Kinne,
Nor yet to no great person
preferment to wynne:
That you disclose the secret that I
shall you teach,
Neither by writing nor by no swift
speech;
But only to the person which you
be sure
Hath ever searched after the
seacrets of Nature?
To them you may reveale the
seacrets of this Art,
Under the Covering of Philosophie
before this world yee depart.

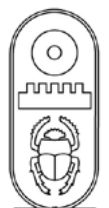
Sooner or later, most students experience a desire to find an adept in order to become their pupil or disciple. But no matter how sincere such a desire is, it is futile for the student to attempt to locate a teacher versed in the Grand Arcanum. "When the pupil is ready, the Master will appear." This ancient precept still holds true. One may search, one may aspire, one may work and study hard until the wee hours of the morning, and yet it will not be evidence that one will ever attain that priceless jewel: the Grand Arcanum. For it takes more than mere study. An honest heart, a clean heart, a true heart, a benevolent and contrite heart accomplishes more than all the book learning can ever do. Yet, strangely enough, learning must accompany the virtues just cited. Without a knowledge and an understanding of natural laws and their corresponding spiritual parallels, no one could ever truly be called an alchemist or a sage.

I am not attempting to vindicate alchemy. It needs no vindication. I am advocating the truth in alchemy, for it is a most wonderful experience to have come to a realization. To experience! To realize! To have found "the light that shined in the darkness."

All the foregoing may seem so discouraging. Perhaps a heavy doubt may weigh upon the heart of the lover of alchemystical research. Whatever the cause or whatever its effects may be, a tremendous responsibility is connected with it. The person who has read about the lives of the alchemists has found that most often many years had to elapse before their goal was reached. Not everyone was as fortunate as Eirenaeus Philalethes, who writes that in his twenty-third year that great blessing in the form of the *lapis philosophorum* was attained. Many had to await another incarnation before they proved themselves worthy and ready to receive it. But, if all doubts are put aside



Illustration 17, "The Demonstration of Perfection," from *The Rosary of the Philosophers*, 1550.



and if a firm belief has grown into a strong faith, then that quickening moment that produces knowledge will eventually help one to come to “understand,” to “realize” the oneness of the universe, the secret behind Creation and the unfolding of Cosmic Consciousness.

This brings us to the natural questions: “What is the secret of creation? And what constitutes life force?” These questions must be answered before the would-be alchemist can accomplish anything in their laboratory.

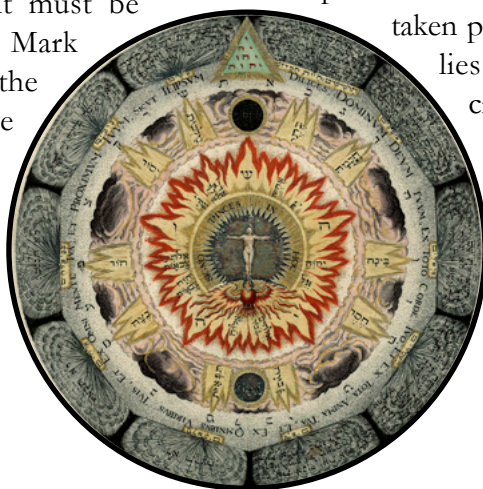
Since everything that grows comes from a seed, the fruit must be contained in its seed. Mark this well, for here lies the secret of creation. The raising of specimen, as said before, is the raising of vibrations. Herbs, animals, as well as minerals and metals, grow from seed. To understand this secret of nature, which is only partly revealed to humankind generally, constitutes the main theoretical subject in alchemy. Once this is known, then only the proper understanding is necessary in order to obtain results in the raising or elevating of specimen, which is nothing else but transmutation. If we can help nature in her ultimate goal, that of bringing her products to perfection, then we are in harmony with her laws. Nature does not resent an artificial effort, or a shortcut, to bring about perfection. To illustrate: the seed of a tomato may be put into the ground late in the fall. Snow and ice may cover it during the winter. But no tomato plant will grow during this time, outdoors in freezing temperatures. However, if the same seed is planted inside where sufficient warmth and moisture is provided, and if it

is placed in the proper matrix it will grow into a plant and bear fruit. This is not contrary to nature. It is in harmony with the natural laws. For fire (heat), water, air, and earth are all that are necessary to cause a seed to grow and bear its predestined fruit. The life force originates not in fire, earth, air, and water. This life force is a separate essence which fills the universe. This essence, or fifth essence (quintessence), is the truly important object that alchemists seek. It is the fifth of the four: fire, water, air, and earth, and is the most important one for the alchemist to find and then to separate. After such a separation has

taken place, the answer to what lies behind the secret of creation will then manifest itself partly in the form of a dense smoke-like vapor that settles, after passing through the condenser tube, into a water-like substance of a yellowish color carrying with itself something oily which gives the tinge to the extracted water. This oily substance, or alchemical Sulphur, is just as essential to alchemical preparations as Salt and Essence.

A repetition of certain phrases and sentences may be found throughout this article. This is not arbitrary; they have been purposely inserted in order to emphasize certain important points more strongly. Much that is written here must be reread many a time in order to lift the veil. This only can be accomplished individually by each student. That which follows will be discovered when the practical experimentation takes place in the laboratory.

Now to the alchemist’s laboratory. This usually takes on a sinister coloring as



The Cosmic Rose from Heinrich Khunrath's Amphi-theatrum sapientiae aeternae, 1595.

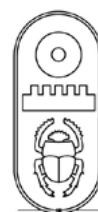


Alchemist's Workshop in the Rosicrucian Alchemy Exhibit in San Jose, California.

one's imagination runs wild. Even today, so-called religious people are inclined to discuss alchemy in rather subdued whispers because, so they claim, it is the devil's work. Ignorance is bliss to some, and no one has a right to take another out of their bliss. We must ignore those that have religious scruples against alchemy, as we do not intend to convert anybody. The aim laid down here is to help the alchemical aspirant on her laborious road. This road begins in the laboratory. Everything in the laboratory revolves around the fire or its emanation: heat. The rest is composed of a few flasks, a condenser, and some ingenuity. It sounds rather simple and really is so. What about all the other instruments that clutter up an alchemist's laboratory, as pictures would have us believe? Just as an artist needs only canvas, paint, and brushes to paint a picture, but may add an indefinite number of other related objects to their studio, so may an alchemist add other related equipment as they see fit. No doubt they are going to experiment and probe deeper into the mysteries to unlock one after another. Once the soul hungers and thirsts for truth and the unfoldment of nature's laws, there is no end to its search until the ultimate has been reached.

Where should a laboratory be located? How can one practice alchemy in a crowded city? Such questions will have to be answered individually by each student. A corner in an attic or a place in the basement is sufficient, as long as there is a continuous source of heat available. The person who wishes to practice our spagyric work will have to do all the work themselves. How fortunate! How else could it be? How else can one appreciate the experience if they do not arrive at the crucial point of knowledge by their own individual efforts? Enough has been said now concerning the hardships and disappointments that undoubtedly will be encountered. If the student, in spite of these difficulties, still wishes to enter the portals of the spagyrist's holy temple, they will find a welcome guide in the following pages. These unfold, in simple language, the process of the lesser circulation.

Those who wait for a complete description, in similar language, of the Grand Arcanum will wait in vain. It cannot be given. It is not permissible. This is of utmost significance: the person who can accomplish in their laboratory what the following pages present by way of instruction, can surely accomplish the



Grand Arcanum, if they are ready. The preparation may take years or even tens of years. No time limit can be set. Some have a natural or inherited tendency, or gift, to delve into the mysteries. Some can never even enter. The “why” for this has no place here. But to those who are ready to travel the royal road of alchemy, I say, “Patience! Patience! Patience! Think and live cleanly and charitably and dwell always in truth—that which you honestly consider and believe to be the truth.” Such a neophyte cannot fail then. Remember, “Seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

The wisdom of the sages represents a culmination of all that is essential for people to have faith in, knowledge of, and understanding about. The person who

has attained such a state of illumination is indeed in harmony with the universe and at peace with the world. To reach this goal of enlightenment, the struggle in this mundane shell need not be of a violent nature, as some want us to believe; rather, it should be a constant alertness to the possibilities that confront us in our daily lives, to raise our thought world above the drudgery of this everyday life, and eventually to find the peace within us. If one has not undergone the alchemy of the inner self, or transcendental alchemy, as it has been termed, they will find it extremely difficult to obtain results in their practical laboratory experimentation. A person may produce things they know nothing about, consequently passing them up as worthless. It is not sufficient only to know; it is understanding that crowns our work. It is here the wisdom of the sages and adepts helps to bring about an understanding within the individual concerning that which they know but do not understand.

In alchemy, there is only one way that leads to results. The aspirant must show their worthiness and their sufficient preparation. This preparation extends over many and varied subjects, but most of all does it concern the search for truth. The living, waking, or conscious state must be immersed in the truthfulness that speaks out of every word and action. There must be a love for humanity that knows no passion, a readiness to gladly share one’s entrusted material possessions with others, and a willingness to put the needs of humanity above personal desires. All of these virtues one must acquire first. Only then will the wisdom of the sages and adepts begin to make sense. Then nature will become a willing companion to serve us. The world, as we will then realize it, begins to take on form and shape, whereas previously it enshrouded us in a haze which our vision could not penetrate. We will come to know the Divine. Illumination



Zhang Shixing 張士行, Alchemist with charcoal basket, ca. 1700.

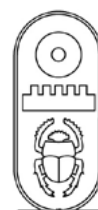


A depiction of the ouroboros and an eagle in a boiling pot in Aurora consurgens, a fifteenth-century alchemical treatise.

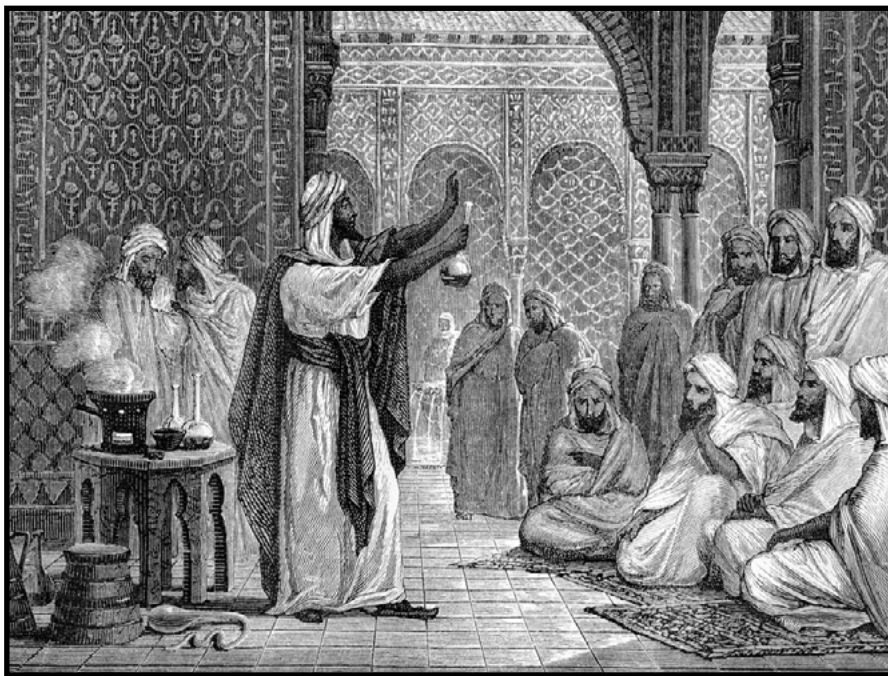
will enlighten our whole life. It will cease to be a mere fight for an existence, for the Divine will have entered our hearts. Peace Profound will dwell within and surround us amidst turmoil and strife. This the wisdom of the sages will help us to attain. But only our own preparation and proper living will let us obtain it. We must do the work ourselves, for no one can do it for us. We will begin to realize that everything is no longer so individualistic as it seemed before. “We” is the term in which we will think. We, the Divine and I, humanity and I, become entwined. The “I” loses its meaning; it becomes submerged in the Cosmic All. “I” becomes many, as part of many that has its ultimate in one. Individuality, though still existing, becomes “All-individuality.” Hence we begin to realize that the “I” is only a segment of the Divine, an entity in itself but not the true self, that which is All, the Divine. The wise ones, sages, adepts, or whatever names we may give them, those who have become illuminated, meet on the same plane. They have climbed to the mountain top. Theirs

is the mastership over the world below. They can see what happens below and that which will happen because of their far-reaching sight. Those in the valley, twisting and turning and searching behind obstacles are too close to the pattern of events to see it. Sages read nature as an open book printed in clear type whose sentences they fully understand.

The writing left us by the sages are typical for the correspondence of their thoughts and explanations. All agree with one another. Only the uninitiated believes they detect inconsistencies and seeming contradictions, due to lack of understanding. Exemplary in its precision and profundity are the seven points dealing with Rosicrucian concepts as given during an extracurricular lecture to students of The Rose Croix University by the late eminent Sovereign Grand Master of that Order, Thor Kiiualetho. The following is quoted (with his permission) from his lecture, “The Basic Rosicrucian Concept.”



1. The Origin of the Universe is Divine. The Universe is a manifestation of, and an emanation from, the One Absolute Cosmic Being. All manifestations of life are centers of consciousness and expressions of the One Life within the framework of its material limitations. There is but One Life in the Universe—the Universal Life. It saturates and fills all forms, shapes, and manifestations of life.
2. The soul is a spark of the divine consciousness in the Universe. As a drop of water is a part of the ocean and all water, so is the soul manifesting in material expression, a part of the One Soul in the Universe. In the human being it develops the personality and the individual expression.
3. The soul-force possesses potentially the powers of the divine principle at work in the universe. The function of life on Earth is to afford the opportunity of developing these potentialities in the personality. Since one incarnation on Earth cannot possibly be sufficient, the personality must return again and again in order to achieve the maximum development.
4. The moral law is one of the basic laws of the universe. It is likewise called the principle of Karma, the result of cause and effect, or action and reaction. There is nothing vindictive about this principle. It works impersonally like any law of nature. As the fruit is contained in the seed, so the consequences are inherent in the act. This principle guides the destinies of both people and nations. Knowledge of this principle gives human beings the power to control our own destiny.
5. Life has a purpose. Life is not meaningless. Happiness is a very



An illustration from the book Vies des Savants Illustres du Moyen Age, 1867, whose caption reads: "Geber teaching chemistry at the school of Edessa." It depicts the famed ninth-century author of numerous Arabic treatises on alchemy and chemistry.

real thing and is a by-product of knowledge, action, and living.

6. Humans have free choice. We have tremendous powers of both good and evil, depending upon our conscious realizations.
7. Since the individual soul is part of the universal soul, human beings have access to powers we do not know, but which time and knowledge and experience will gradually reveal to us.

Hermetic philosophers have taught the very same fundamentals even as philosophers of the future will do, for that

which constitutes truth will remain truth. It cannot be changed. But the theories of humans and their opinions, which are incorrectly given by some as truth, are subject to change. Because one calls oneself a philosopher does not necessarily make one such. One is only a philosopher who has a sincere love for the wisdom that manifests universally and who strives as sincerely to apply it in one's daily life. Wisdom is acquired through righteous living. It is understanding applied. The acquisition of a degree of Doctor of Philosophy, as conferred upon graduates in institutions of higher learning, does not make one a philosopher, as much as those in possession of such a degree may believe in their right to such a title.



A portion of the Ripley Scroll, ca. 1700. The banner above the sun reads "The Red Sea. The Red Sol. The Red Elixir Vitae."

To be acquainted with the history of philosophy, the lives and teachings of those called philosophers, is only a study and knowledge of their universal concepts and what has been derived from them. To be a philosopher, therefore, means to understand and live according to that understanding, knowing well that only by giving unhesitatingly and unselfishly will our belief in humankind be justified. When this has been realized, only then will alchemy become something real. Transmutation always takes place on a higher plane, and in the physical world laws cannot be

adhered to or violated without producing karmic manifestations. Beneficial karma, if it is permissible to use a term, because karma is impartial, is brought about by harmonious applications of natural laws. These natural laws must be adhered to if, according to predestined results, we wish to obtain what nature has decreed.

If the foregoing even in its very condensed form has made any sense at all to the student of alchemy, it must be apparent then why that alchemical

gem, which all alchemists desire to produce, has been called the Philosopher's Stone. How often it is that we use words and attach no meaning to them, only because we fail to understand.

