

Hermetic Initiation

VI

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Part Eight

Alchemy

There are many and varying opinions about what alchemy is, or is supposed to be. At the end of the day it might be noted that very few of these opinions, whether based on practice or simply upon theory, have little relationship to the facts of the matter. Whatever your personal opinions or definitions of alchemy might be, or whatever the opinions of others might amount to, I am not at all concerned with them here. The purpose of this paper, as with those that precede it, and those which follow, is to present a view of Hermetism, specifically here of alchemy, which can act as a common ground for understanding amongst those who are studying the Art within the circle of students that has congregated around these papers.

In order for this group to be able to discuss the theory and the manual practice of our Art, *productively*, and economically, it is necessary to have a common ground of understanding ... to possess a common understanding of technical language, and to share a common image of an alchemical world-model in order to communicate ideas essential to such a productive interaction.

Having already laid out the basic universal principles of Hermetic philosophy in the previous papers, we can now turn specifically to a consideration of alchemy itself and apply these concepts of Hermetic philosophy to a definition of alchemy.

I have presented the idea of the Universal Mechanism of nature, which, I have made clear, is resident in all the departments, conditions, systems and objects in nature. It is hoped that by this point you have a clear picture in your mind of what this mechanism is and how it affects all of creation.

*In its most abstract, its broadest and most universal sense, we might define *alchemy* as being the *action* of this universal mechanism in nature.*

This means we can find operating in every area of existence, in the birth, life, death and rebirth of every being, every group or society, every philosophy, in art and science, indeed every object, system or condition, the process of alchemy ... or the universal mechanism. Therefore, as I have suggested, broadly speaking, alchemy can be found everywhere and in everything.

But for practical purposes, that is, the practical purposes of our art itself, and in consideration of the actual alchemical tradition, such a general definition does not serve any real use. We cannot ignore the fact that while this general, universal, definition must be accepted as accurate, the original masters of our art used the term *alchemy* or *alchemist* with something more specific and less general in mind.

While there is little doubt in the minds of informed students that alchemists have concerned themselves with a personal-internal esoteric dimension to their art, the foremost and primary focus of the alchemist's activities was chemio-energetic. I will suggest, therefore, that the definition of alchemy that would have been most accepted by the old alchemists would be that:

Alchemy is the art and science of discovering the secrets of matter, especially where they relate to the working of the universal mechanism in the realm of chemistry.

There have always been three levels or depths of research into alchemy though, each in its own way valid. While it might be the grossest level of practice the primarily chemical focus is still valid. When I say 'chemical' I refer not to the modern chemists point-of-view, but rather to the classic alchemist who, for whatever reason, was unaware of the deeper esoteric facet of the art, but nevertheless practiced canonical classic alchemical processes and obtained degrees of alchemical results. This first level of involvement we might refer as a neophyte's depth of understanding.

The second level of participation consists of the artist understanding that beyond the simple chemical manipulations required by canon practice, there also exists a deeper more mysterious energetic level and he seeks to understand and incorporate this facet in his work. I believe today that the greatest number of individuals who consider themselves traditional lab alchemists belong to this group. I might add that the members of this second group often, also, believe that this chemio-energetic aspect of the art is somehow related to the spiritual life of man. But it would also be accurate to say that very few members of this group have any real idea at all of what this chemio-spiritual relationship consists of. Some would like to but don't, some believe they do, but in reality few have any real idea at all. At the same time, because this second group lacks a real understanding of chemio-energetic traditional alchemy they often are reduced to falling back on to a pseudo-chemist's views and behaviours.

The third level of participation is the level that the smallest number of artists belong to, by far. The individuals working with alchemy at this level not only accept the concepts members of the previous two levels accept, but they also possess the added facet that they understand and include in their work a knowledge of the relationship that exists between the chemio-energetic side of the art and the psycho-spiritual side. It is important to understand that members of this group do not simply believe such a relationship exists (which is the peculiar stance of the top-end of group two individuals), but they know it exists and they understand how it works to a greater rather than lesser degree.

We might add, then, to the previous definition: (*Alchemy is the art and science of discovering the secrets of matter, especially where they relate to the working of the universal mechanism in the realm of chemistry*) ... that the depth at which any individual student of alchemy is interested in, and understands, the ... *working of the universal mechanism in the realm of chemistry* ... depends on which of the former three groups he fits into.

All of this having been said, it should be understood that the direction in which the information provided in these papers is headed is towards the third level, described above. All of our previous research, both collectively and individually, leads us to the firm understanding that the chemical focus of alchemy is, in its final estimate, intimately connected with the psycho-spiritual evolution of the individual alchemist.

Exactly how any particular student might need to deal with these two aspects of the art, the psychological and the laboratory, in order to reap the greatest benefits they offer, is a matter of individual requirement. Our experience, though, has taught us that for the dedicated alchemist it is the manual labour that more often than not should precede the internal work. In this way a strong foundation is built before the difficult and often-treacherous passage of the inner ocean is navigated.

Having provided a definition of alchemy, the next consideration, essential to the student who intends departing from a solely theoretical study of the art in order to move into the realm of practical experience, is a motive.

The practice of laboratory alchemy does not merely provide an interesting model through which the labourer may contemplate the workings of the Universal Mechanism. In other words it is not ultimately simply an intellectual exercise that grows out of conclusions drawn from the manual labour.

The motive for laboratory practice is to produce alchemical substances, the ingestion of which is intended to *catalyse* the alchemist's spiritual emancipation.

Ultimately, it is this factor that makes laboratory alchemy a spiritual, or rather *initiatory*, discipline.

While the alchemical journey must, by nature, begin in the laboratory, once the adept has begun to awaken his spiritual faculties through the ingestion of the highest order of spagyric preparations, he will realise that proper training in the esoteric (spiritual) facet of the art is now essential.

So, at this point in our journey we reach a fork in the road. One path departs into the realm of internal alchemy, and the other into territory of more immediate interest, the laboratory work.

Summation of Section One

I have presented the following concepts as being essential to a proper understanding of Hermetism, and to success in the coming practical experiments:

- (1) That there is a Supreme Being.
- (2) That the Supreme Being has a plan for creation.
- (3) That the process of initiation is designed to align the student with the plan of the Supreme Being.
- (4) That during the developmental stage of our lives we are indoctrinated into the fundamental concepts that allow us to live in and experience this world.
- (5) That this indoctrination is flawed.
- (6) That the flaws in this indoctrination are responsible for our not having access to our full potential, and to some degree for our deaths.
- (7) That one of the side effects of living a life based on this flawed indoctrination is that our perception of reality is distorted and we exist in a binary world where the two sides of our self war against each other.
- (8) That while this conflict is essential to our growth, at some point equilibrium must be re-established in order that we can profit from our growth.
- (9) That the process of initiation is, when carried out properly and completely, designed to fix the flaws in our perception and end our internal conflict.
- (10) That when the flaws in our perception are fixed we become a different kind of being, a superhuman, that exists in a world that is not binary, but is unitary.
- (11) That a proper effective initiation changes the conditions of our death and opens up to us, at that point, a vast spiritual vista.