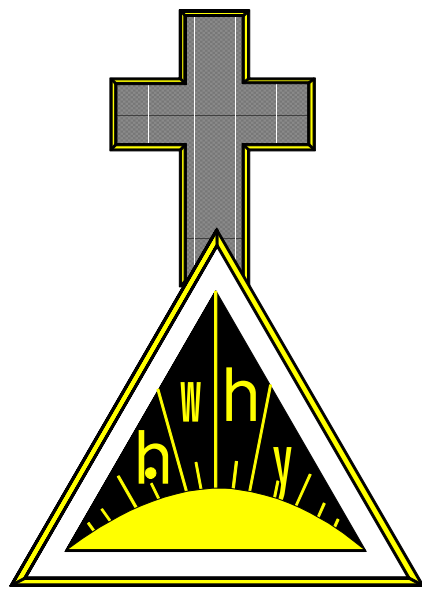


The Hermetic Order Of The
GOLDEN DAWN^{Intl.}

**INTRODUCTION TO
ALCHEMY**



PRACTICUS 3=8

It is not our purpose in this grade to make you an alchemist. As a matter of fact, nobody has the ability or power to make you an alchemist of any sort because alchemy is only truly learned through higher knowledge and wisdom. Chemistry is the science of the outer plane while alchemy is the science of the inner plane. Another way of understanding alchemy is that chemistry deals with physical matter while alchemy deals with astral principles. That isn't to say that alchemy cannot and does not affect the physical plane. It most certainly does. Another definition that might help us better understand alchemy is that chemistry is the science that may be learned by anyone who has ordinary intellectual capacities and a certain amount of skill necessary for its application and the education that goes along with it. Alchemy, contrary to chemistry, is the art and science which cannot be understood without understanding basic principles. Alchemy works on the basic principle that everything in nature has a threefold aspect. Paracelsus would say, "The highest aspect of alchemy is the transformation of vices and virtues by the fire of love for the purpose of good, the purification of the mind through suffering, and the elevation of the Divine principle over the animal element of the soul."

The exact origin of alchemy is really unknown to us. Budge states in his book *Egyptian Magic* that the manipulation of metals and the knowledge of their chemistry and magical powers was called "Khemeia" by the Egyptians. The Arabs added the article "al" to create the word Al-Khemeia. It is perhaps from this word that the Western word of alchemy is derived. Now as to who the originator of alchemy was, most would give credit to Hermes Trismegistos as the father of alchemy. Hermes is analogous to the Egyptian deity known as Thoth or Tehuti, the Ibis headed god. As to alchemy's actual human origins, we are really not certain who its founder was. It really doesn't matter in the context of our discussion other than to say that it is found in almost all spiritual courses.

One basic principle that is established in all of the cultures in which alchemy is a major part is the principle of the four elements as the basic foundation of the science and art of alchemy. We know that in modern magic the four elements consist of Fire, Water, Air, and Earth as established by the Tetragrammaton, YHVH. If we take the four elemental sigils and look at them we will notice that they are really opposites of each other. For example, Fire is an upward triangle, Water is a downward triangle, Air is an upward triangle with a line through it, and Earth is a downward triangle with a line through it. The diagram that is included at the end of this lesson shows both the Fire symbol and the Water symbol being superimposed over the planet Earth with the center axis as the equator and the surrounding substance or the oradic substance of the Earth is Air. So, essentially, what is illustrated is Fire and Water over Earth surrounded by Air which brings a total unification of the elements.

Each of the four basic elements, as we know from Knowledge Lecture One in the Neophyte grade, have basic qualities attributed to them, such as heat and dryness, etc.. In examining these basic qualities of the four elements, it gives rise to a conceptual thought of varying the elements in different proportions. The body or substance can be transformed into another substance by altering the proportions of these elements, thus altering the nature of the element in relation to the other elements and to the base substance. In addition to the four elements we have another substance known in alchemy as Prima Materia. Think of this Prima Materia as the substance that emanates

from rtk, otherwise known as Primordial Matter, often times called Divine Light. It is from this Prima Materia, this life energy, that all other substances are made, formed, and created. All other substances can be brought back down to their lowest common point, their smallest denominator, which would be Prima Materia. From here a lower form of alchemy can be understood and that is the concept of changing lead into gold.

The concept or the theory is that by reducing a base metal such as lead to its Prima Materia and then by adding the proper amounts of elemental matter, it can be changed into a different substance such as gold. In essence, this does not differ with the *Sepher Yetzirah* which says that we must achieve hmkj wisdom which would be the emanation of that Prima Materia coming out of rtk, that total unity and integration before we can experience the flash of illumination that is emanated by the sephiroth. Before we can truly experience the sephiroth, we must achieve hmkj wisdom, a total unity, the unity beyond words and beyond thoughts. This would be the emanation of Prima Materia in alchemy coming out of the Primordial Point of rtk.

It is in the meditation and examination of this Prima Materia that the modern theory of alchemy has developed; there are three principles of alchemy composed of three essential bases. These principles are called sulfur, salt, and mercury by the alchemist. Let us not become confused here. Often times we tend to think of these three prime bases of alchemy, sulfur, salt, and mercury, as the literal chemical elements. These symbols may be analogous with the actual basis of alchemy but they are definitely not what we are talking about. These in fact were blinds designed to hinder the budding alchemist who might become a threat to the more experienced alchemist.

Of the three alchemical principles, mercury was referred back to the four elements known as Quintessence. This Quintessence is also known as Prima Materia. It is unity, oneness, and it is from this oneness that the law of polarity or the prime principles of Hermetics are derived; the One is God, the Divinity, the All. It is from this primordial oneness that the law of unity is derived as exemplified by the pillars known as Boaz and Yachin, the female and male, negative and positive, Yin and Yang, and more importantly to the alchemist, the Moon and the Sun. So from this conception of polarity, we have a basic alchemical principle which is, "The one became two by the law of polarity, which is revealed within the three essentials that will be found along the four elements wherein it is to be found the Quintessence, which is not of the four but one of the three."

Each one of these three alchemical principles of sulfur, mercury, and salt have different qualities and play different roles in creation and manifestation. They are the three principles of nature. For example, when examining the process of combustion, this principle equals sulfur and sulfur is combustion. It is the principle of combustion. It is the essence in plants that gives them fragrance. The Arabic alchemist Ghebor states that sulfur is fatness. When we are talking about inner alchemy, we are talking about sulfur as being a principle of the soul, the principle of consciousness. The process of consciousness is a process of combustion. If we look at the alchemical principle of sulfur in a tincture, it is what tincts. Sulfur is the animal principle, the vitality of animals, it has a role in coagulation. Thus it helps concentrate and fortify the life force. Sulfur can be described as red, active, energetic, and masculine. It is symbolized by the Sun.

The Ruach Elohim or Prana, the vital life force, from an alchemical principle is that of mercury. Even the energy found in the testicles of a male, when not aroused, is considered feminine in nature, equated with a mercurial aspect, and would be attributed to mercury. It is when it is heated up as in being aroused that it alchemically changes. This mercurial principle also endows gold with its luster. Sulfur is responsible for the color but mercury is responsible for the luster. It is the mercurial principle that allows gold to be malleable and fusible.

Mercury is equated with the spirit, the Prima Materia. This mercurial principle relates to Luna, the seed or sperm of all. As a visual portrait we see Thoth standing in the Sign of the Enterer stretched out over the path of the sun and speaking the words of creation. If we look closer at the plant world, we see that alcohol becomes the vehicle of the life force for mercury while sulfur is represented by the essential oils contained therein. Is it any wonder why so many of the magical oils and blends that are created don't work? It is because those who create them do not understand the magical principles of alchemy.

The third alchemical principle is that of salt. Salt is the essence, the body of all matter. Salt represents solidification. Salt transfers its solidification into resistance. This resistance is in the direct path of alchemical fire. If we look at salt again in the plant world, we see that salt is ash. It is usually gray to white in color to a salty substance. It becomes the reconciler or the medium to which sulfur and mercury can unite. This again is stated repeatedly in the Golden Dawn Neophyte Initiation as a beautiful alchemical principle in the triangle and that in all things there are two opposing forces and a third force that unites them. In the Middle Pillar Ritual, it is salt that you must become. This is the uniting force of mercury, the feminine force, and sulfur, the masculine force. Mercury is represented by the black pillar and sulfur is represented as the white pillar and you yourself become the Middle Pillar or salt. In alchemy this is called "a union of opposites," or "a marriage of the Sun and Moon." This is the state that is sought by the alchemist both in external alchemy and in internal alchemy.

In all the kingdoms, whether it is the plant, animal, mineral, or even the sephirotic kingdoms, the three principles of alchemy will always play a role. It is here that the alchemical principle of change takes place or one matter can be changed into another by varying the proportions of these principles. It was the eminent alchemist and scientist Basil Valentine who stated that by varying these principles one could create different metals. With inner alchemy, we can think of in terms of varying these amounts, or by understanding what these symbols represent, we change the final outcome of who we are. Modern physics has taught us this. We know that by changing an electron, proton, or neutron, we completely change the chemical nature of a substance. In 1941, the physicists Sherr Bainbridge and Anderson succeeded in transmuting a radioactive isotope of mercury into pure gold. The cost may have been prohibitive, but it was accomplished showing that it was possible. In regards to metals, it was the ancient alchemist Eirenaeus Philalethes who stated that the metamorphosis of all metals is essentially that of the seat of gold. Essentially all metals are potentially gold.

If we look at the three alchemical principles of sulfur, salt, and mercury, we see that they combine to form a trinity. This trinity is found in numerous religions, symbologies, and mythologies. We can break this trinity down into the physical

properties of solids, liquids, and gases, or Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It can also be broken down into Isis, Apophis, and Osiris, or Osiris, Horus, and Isis. A scientific trinity is protons, neutrons, and electrons.

As far as Western alchemy is concerned, one cannot really be a competent alchemist without having a good understanding of magical principles of the Golden Dawn, Qabalah, and astrology. It was our early ancestors, the Rosicrucians, who began the blending of the Qabalah with alchemy into a cohesive and coherent system. So there is an indefinable connection between magic, Qabalah, and Astrology. It was through the understanding of Qabalah and astrological principles that we developed, in early science and alchemy, a starting point from which to begin. For example, what herb can be used for a specific ailment? Our knowledge of this comes from the Qabalah, magic and from learning astrological principles. We know from the study of astrology that people born under the same zodiacal sign will have similar characteristics. It is the in understanding of these characteristics of plants, metals, and scents, etc. as they relate to the Qabalah that give us a basis for our alchemical workings in the creation of elixirs, incenses, herbal remedies, and modern medicine.

Recommended reading is *The Golden Dawn* by Israel Regardie, and *The Alchemist Handbook*. It is not the intention in this grade to turn you into an alchemist, but rather to give you a basic understanding in the nature of alchemy both in inner alchemy as well as outer. One principle that should be emphasized before closing is that all alchemy, all change, takes place on the inner plane. For example, two people in a kitchen cooking a gourmet dinner. One has had some practice and experience and can visualize not only the taste but the scent, quality, texture, and the nature of that dinner before beginning. The other person following the same directions is apt to fail, for he has little experience and may not have the ability to visualize or understand the nature or the quality of the work that he is undertaking. Therefore he is not creating on a higher plane of existence. As the Emerald Tablet states, "The things that we create above, must manifest below." So all alchemy, even on the exterior plane, must depend on the inner plane first. That is one reason why alchemy can be an important part of our daily lives. For even in the practice of simple alchemy such as the creation of an incense or the cooking of a fine meal, we are learning an exercise that allows us to create on the higher levels, and then have it manifest on the physical level. This is the principle of magic.

