

# What is Alchemy

By Steve Kalec



What is Alchemy? What are the spirit and the secret of this Hermetic doctrine and tradition? What hidden knowledge is there to be found in the Alchemists secret language that is expressed in such obscure symbols and allegories? Is there really such a thing as the Philosopher's Stone, and what is it? Can it really be found and made by the true seeker? Is it something tangible or something philosophical? Can it really transmute lead to gold, heal the sick, give longevity and even render one immortal? Is there really such a thing as the Elixir of Life? What kind of work and experiments do the alchemists do in their laboratories and why? Can we do the same work in our own homes and what does it do for us? What can one achieve with it? These are the questions that we as students of the Hermetic and

Noble Art of Alchemy ask ourselves in our studies, our practice and in our quest. This very profound philosophy known as the Hermetic philosophy pierces the very mysteries of creation and being, and it is the foundation of all religions, philosophies and psychologies.

Alchemy, according to the philosophers, is the science of God, the law of the universe. Alchemists say that God is the Grand Alchemist and his body the universe is the laboratory. The task of the alchemist is to center himself within the consciousness of the divine creative principle so that he can understand the universe and all its diversities as one great process. The alchemists defined this as the raising of vibrations. This is accomplished through purification of the entity, whether it be on the physical plane which we call the tangible plane or whether it be on the spiritual intangible plane.

Alchemy is the transmutation of something inferior to something superior. It is the art of the manipulation of the energies of life. It is an art and it is the secret of the purification and the elevation of the body, soul and spirit of any substance in the three kingdoms of nature, being the mineral, vegetable and animal. Alchemy is the process of bringing natural substances to their inherent perfection.

There is a very big difference between alchemy and chemistry. To a chemist all is matter and he only sees chemicals and their combinations to form other chemicals. A chemist does not view the bodies it works with as being alive. To an alchemist all is life as he sees the universal being in all things. The alchemist sees being in the world and the world in being. Alchemy is a biodynamic system which uses the forces of life in its operations. He purifies and combines life energies of the Soul and Spirit in matter to form purer more noble and higher energies of life. The alchemical operation is a threefold work accomplished on bodies; the effects are purification, regeneration and evolution. The real difference between alchemy and chemistry is that to an alchemist soul and spirit are always accounted for when they deal with matter. The element of consciousness is always well included and established in their experiments. This is something that the new quantum physics is only lately beginning to realize in what is called the uncertainty principle and the virtual particle theory.

On studying matter scientists have discovered that what they know about a substance changes because of the very fact that they are looking at it. In other words they have found that if they look at the position of a matter particle, then they have changed its momentum by altering its absorbed energy, and because of this, the very substance as a particle has changed and is different. They are beginning to realize in a scientific manner that consciousness effects matter. That is, as our consciousness of something changes, then that something has changed. Alchemists have always known this as Reality vs. Actuality. There is a philosophical dictum that states, "Change your conception of the world, and you will have changed the world".

In nature there is a truth which can only be realized with senses other than those of the flesh. Philosophers have always known the magic contained in this truth. They have seen this truth in the miracle of a tiny seed breaking through the earth having conquered death. They have seen it in the unfolding of a flower. It is seen as when observing the rushing waves in

harmonious symphony with the dancing palm trees on a sunny day at the beach. It is seen everywhere and it is found in oneself. The blessed alchemical marriage of the Sun and the Moon is a conjunction of physical fact with metaphysical reality, a union of the outer objective consciousness with the inner subjective awareness. Alchemy is veritably an art, and the alchemist must become sensitive to an inner receptiveness. Through such receptiveness, one's awareness allows that the alchemist be cleansed by the work just as his matter is purified during his experiment. A true and authentic Alchemical transmutation occurs at the convergence of the two worlds, the spiritual and the material.

What are the alchemists in search of? They seek to extract the Quintessence in all things. Alchemy is about isolating and collecting the Vital Life force itself, isolating it so that it can be condensed, purified and manipulated to conform with the alchemists will. An Alchemist captures the life essence into a flask, he condenses life energy from the Sun. Alchemy is in short, the Art of Evolution. Alchemy is the art of elevating a substance to their highest level of perfection that they can attain originally mandated by God while still on this earth in the material form. The goal of Alchemy is the Great Opus or the Great Work which is the purification of the lesser or gross and its elevation to the greater or more refined, whether in plants, metals, or in consciousness. The ultimate goal of the alchemist is to find the Prima Materia or the First Matter of nature as the dark, passive, unformed and raw virgin and universal stuff of creation. Through the alchemical process the alchemist transforms this prima Materia into the Philosophers Stone. This accomplishment is most commonly known as the transformation of Lead into Gold, the heaviest, darkest, densest most earthbound, least valuable metal becoming Gold: Incarnated Light; the most glittering, luminous, valuable metal; symbol of the sun and of spiritual attainment and consciousness, spiritual illumination as cosmic consciousness which is the ultimate goal of the human evolution.

There are many facets to the practice of alchemy. They range from the spiritual, psychological, metaphysical, and the practical laboratory alchemy. The work and the modus operandi are universal in whatever path we chose. The key to practicing alchemy is work, for it is in the work that the alchemical process reveals itself. It is in the work that the alchemist becomes one with his matter as he realizes himself being in the crucible with his matter. It is in the work that an intimate relationship will develop with the experiment through which the vigil alchemist will realize the alchemical

forces awakening in him or her through the law of correspondence. A resonance is produced by the harmonious and sympathetic attunement established between the alchemist and his experiment. The steps of the separation of the subtle from what is the gross, and the steps in the purification through water in the solve stage, and through fire in the calcination stage will spill over into one's being and there begin the inner process. The very work is knowledge of nature and a means to spiritual development.

According to the Philosophers of Nature there are three adages related to alchemical and spagyric work are:

- The alchemist accelerates the process of Nature by never stepping out of its rules.
- The alchemist removes the obstacles which prevent Nature from acting spontaneously.
- The alchemist strives to help Nature in the work of universal reintegration.

It is suggested that one should start practice with practical laboratory alchemy in the vegetable kingdom as plant alchemy. It is a pleasant path because the work involves one with the beautiful world of precious essences of herbs, flowers and plants to make wonderful alchemical tinctures, elixirs, oil essences, precious salts and plant stones. These not only have powerful curative properties, but through the process in the alchemical work, the practitioner attunes with the higher forces of nature, and leads him to inner initiation of at least the whitening or Lunar stage.

Plant alchemy and the Spagyric art is a science with a profound philosophy in its background. The word Spagyria has its roots in two Greek words: *spao*, to draw out, to divide; and *ageiro*, to gather, to bind, to join. These two concepts form the foundation of every genuine alchemical work, hence the often-quoted phrase "*Solve et coagula, et habebis magisterium !*" Dissolve and bind, and you will have the magistry. Paracelsus has said, "*Therefore learn Alchimiam, otherwise known as Spagyria, which teaches you to separate the false from the true.*" The work in plant alchemy wonderfully introduces the adept to the Hermetic Philosophy and the alchemical process, while at the same time allowing him to gently get

accustomed to the animating energies of nature on both the physical and spiritual levels.

“Ora et Labora”, is the motto of the alchemists. Ora meaning to pray, from which comes the word, oratory. Labora, meaning to work, from which comes the word laboratory. Why the laboratory and what do the alchemists do in their laboratories? There is a beautiful and wonderful relationship that can be developed between the alchemist and his experiment through the laws of correspondences between the living animated symbols of the experiment and the inner awareness of the alchemist. In alchemy the true alchemist knows that he is always in the crucible with his experiment. What is happening to the substances in the experiment is transpiring also within himself through correspondence. He can see himself or see the universe in a boiling retort and may feel the boundaries fade between the flask and the Self. Since he is raising vibrations by the purifying, cleansing and the exalting of his substances in his crucible or in his retort, through his attunement, a harmonious sympathetic resonance is had, and the alchemical process is spilled over into his being as an inner initiation. Outside lab work is objective work which will stimulate and set in motion inner subjective work through the alchemical law of correspondence through which the formation of the Philosopher’s Stone in his heart will begin to be felt. The outside objective work stimulates an inner response and an awareness, or an inner initiation.

Through this outer and inner translations and transfers of energies, not only does the outside work affect the inner being but also that which is realized as within, can and will exteriorize and manifest outside. Thus not only does an inner awakening occur, but also a relative and proportional outside manifestation is had on the objective level and a true outside transmutation can be the alchemist’s success. This is what is called the Magistry, the Great Opus or Work.

In the alchemical work using plants and herbs, one is lead to inner attunement with the inner energies of the soul and spirit. He is lead to an inner awareness and contact with the inner guardian and master or the higher self. Through the interplays of these concentrated energies, and through the sympathetic resonances set up by the alchemical laws of correspondences between what is above and what is below, what is inner and what is outer, the alchemist also succeeds in the making of marvelous, potent and beneficial alchemical tinctures and elixirs that cure sickness, brings harmony

and peace, and attunes one with the All. Alchemist and teacher Jean Dubuis says: “The whole alchemical process occurs simultaneously with the inner and the outer. The physical purification of the body with the preparation from the alchemical laboratory refine the energies and make them more receptive to the finer vibrations of the Cosmic. The spirit increases its awakening and consciousness expands. This increased consciousness enables us to further penetrate into the elixirs of the laboratory which reach then higher vibrations and raise our self to a higher level. And thus the process continues and accelerates into an inner and outer spiral, into an evolution of consciousness.”

The Alchemist understands that there is only one mind, the universal cosmic mind of the All. There is only ‘one’ energy permeating the universe as the one universal life source. This irradiating energy divides itself and descends in the order of creation into various different levels of vibrations, intelligences, powers and levels of consciousness through its eternal act in becoming. There is always within Itself an established and unbreakable unity through the universal law of “As Above So Below.” There is only one being, the infinite and eternal that which is, the universal life force that has an absolute affinity to become, unfold and manifest itself from that which is the invisible to that which is the visible. This subtle yet most powerful energy is in everything. There is nothing in which this energy cannot be found in and nothing can be found apart from it. In a book called ‘Kibalion,’ written by ‘Three Initiates,’ there is written a law that states, “All is in THE ALL, and THE ALL is in All.”

It is this substance that the alchemist seeks and works with in his crucibles, alembics and retorts. It is this energy that that is the alchemist’s Philosophic Mercury that he seeks to extract and purify from her terrestrial prison and set it free as it rises up to heaven where it acquires the powers of the above. It is with this magical stuff that he helps nature in her evolution as it descends again to earth and fills it with a new life as it saturates it with the divine energies and light to raise the vibration of matter, to exalt the salt of the earth and spiritualize it. In this process lies the second most important secret of alchemy. “Volatilize the fixed and fix the volatile.” Render the terrestrial or material into the spiritual by exalting matter by raising its vibrations, and render the spiritual into the material or terrestrial by bringing the spirit down into objective realization.

The “Motus Operandi,” the method of the operation of this volatilizing and fixing is through the regiment of the alchemist’s Secret Fire. This is the first most important secret of the alchemists. The masters say, “Above all, seek ye the secret fire, for without it you can do nothing in our art.” In alchemy, it can be shown, how a plant is turned inside out. An alchemist exalts and spiritualizes the matter, the salts of a plant, its body, and he will fix it, capture its spiritual aspect, its soul quality and make an alchemical elixir or a plant stone. These will have powerful and magical qualities belonging to the essential values and attributes of the plant, which qualities having been multiplied, concentrated and transmuted into a higher order through the alchemical process.

To the study of alchemy there are many aspects. Whether we are a laboratory practical alchemist, or a transcendental and metaphysical alchemist, whether we study its profound philosophy or study it in psychology, all these aspects very much complement each other. Alchemy truly has most beautiful secrets to reveal. The pursuit of its mysteries can be very fulfilling and satisfying. The veil to the entrance of its temple will be lifted to all earnest seekers who truly are sincere in their quest.

Ora, Lege, et Labora,  
Steve Kalec

