

A New Perspective on Alchemy

By FP

As a foundation stone for Athanor, the ICOM degree studying and practising Alchemy, I decided to spend a year collecting basic elements and materials, and meditating on their Alchemical properties and uses. As a result, six months into this work, I have come to a new perspective on Alchemy that I would like to share with ICOM members. It answers the questions I have often been asked, such as “What is Alchemy,” and “What exactly does an Alchemist do.”

What is Alchemy?

The word derives from the Greek, meaning “the alloying of metals,” and it is common knowledge that the principle aim of its practitioners was to turn lead into gold, or create an elixir bestowing eternal life. Other writers particularly Jung, delve deeper into the art, noting that the chemical transformations and strange diagrams of kings in baths and ravens in bedrooms can be taken as emblems of spiritual transformation or psychological development.

Thus, the twelve stages of turning lead into gold can be seen as an initiatory system describing and foreshadowing the steps of moving from a mundane life to a mystical one. This is certainly something that the Athanor degree will be looking at in more detail, with the assistance of the Initiates of the Labyrinth degree. However, to begin the degree I wanted to look at the building blocks of the Alchemical system, which are the chemicals and metals themselves. I decided to find a common Alchemical material each month, and make notes as to its significance, both Alchemical and mundane, and then at the end of the year perform an Alchemical Mass involving all the twelve materials.

I began with salt, and placed some in a dish by my bed. As the days passed, the salt obviously began to draw moisture out of the air. As I observed the water collecting in the bowl, I began to think of the process as a means of bringing out into the open what previously existed in the atmosphere without any sign. Once this property had been noted, I not only began to observe areas in my life where a similar drawing out was taking place, but more dramatic events of this nature unfolded, culminating in a significant change to my life. Once the month was over, I placed the resultant saltwater in a test-tube and moved onto another basic element, sand.

It was during my work with sand that I began to see another view of Alchemy. I had spent the month looking for some sand in my daily life, to place in a bowl - as I had done with the salt. My first opportunity came when I was told I should get some sand and grit to put around a new plant Soror Brina wanted to put in the garden. I was also told where to find a discarded bag of sand near a building site. Unfortunately, this first search revealed nothing. A week later, I was at a garage, filling the car with deisal, when I noticed a bucket of sand, obviously used to cover up fuel spills on the forecourt. I began thinking that it seemed odd that a material here could also be used for something entirely different - there is little connection between covering up slippery petrol and planting roses. This thought progressed to the question of “why did I want sand at this moment, and not something else?” Obviously, I wanted sand for the garden. Again, “Why?” And again, so the garden looks nice. “Why?” So that I can sit in it and enjoy it. “Why?” And so forth. As the thought cascaded, I began to realise that all of us, all of the time, are collecting and redistributing various materials through the process of our lives in order to fulfil our ambitions. This is what Alchemy is.

What does an Alchemist Do?

Given that we are all practising our own alchemy, what makes a good Alchemist? Quite simply, if you want to be a good Alchemist, you need to apply a consistent and comprehensive perspective to your work with the materials in your environment. That is to say, you need to ensure that everything you are working with is contributing to your aims, and nothing is distracting you or providing an obstacle to those aims. This is basically purification and consecration in the esoteric systems; the removal of all things not required for the magical act, and the active dedication of what remains to the aim in mind.

Then, like building blocks, you need to ensure that all the materials together work together, or at least, work in a sequence, and will produce the aims you have in mind. Hence, consistent and comprehensive.

Here are some examples of the compounds of this perspective of alchemy;

- *A career or choice of (un)employment.*
- *A relationship*
- *A home*
- *A family*
- *A religion*

Here are some examples of the elements from this viewpoint;

- *Yourself*
- *Money*
- *Time*
- *A Book*
- *Food*
- *An Emotion*

And finally, some of the Alchemical transformations undertaken in this manner;

- *Turning Time into Food (i.e., spending three days working for money which is exchanged for food)*
- *Adding Yourself, Someone Else, and Food to create a Relationship (going out for a meal with a friend)*
- *Turning jealousy into a rug (perhaps by acknowledging jealousy as unrecognised desire to accomplish oneself what someone else has done, in this example, a really excellent rag rug)*

There are obviously a great deal many more comparisons to be made once we begin to apply Alchemical as a link between our aims of transcendence and our lives in the material world. It becomes all too clear that we often collect elements in our Athanor, or mixing pot, that spoil the overall mixture so that we have to tip everything out and start again. Experimentation, as always, is the key, and the maintaining of this perspective throughout the work - what is it I am trying to achieve, and what materials am I using to achieve it? This is what an Alchemist does.

www.templum.com

A Site for Enquiring Minds