

The Symbolism of Alchemy



by Robert M. Place

Hermes Publications
2008

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The *Alchemical Tarot* is designed to illustrate that there is a close connection between alchemical symbolism and the Tarot. The Fool and trumps in *The Alchemical Tarot* each relate to an alchemical material or process, which is part of the Great Work or Opus of alchemy that leads to the creation of the Philosopher's Stone, a mystical catalyst that transforms what it touches to its highest form. Composed of the mysterious fifth element, it can cure any illness, turn lead into gold, and turn an ordinary person into an enlightened sage. The four minor suits relate to the alchemical elements and to four related temperaments. To achieve a deeper understanding of the deck it is, therefore, necessary to study alchemical symbolism. In this course, we focus on the symbolism in the Fool and 21 trumps and in others we will cover the minor suits.

It is not surprising that the word gibberish originally referred to texts written by the Medieval Arabic alchemists Jabir, known in Latin as Giber. Many people find alchemy a daunting and confusing subject and this impression is not entirely unfounded. Every alchemist explained his or her work in personal terms and symbols that were derived from unique visions. Descriptions of the alchemical process, therefore, vary considerably from alchemist to alchemist. Often the same symbol has a different meaning from one text to another. For example, a green lion in one text may refer to the ore from which antimony is extracted and in another to vitriol, while in *The Alchemical Tarot*, it symbolizes Mercury in its raw or poisonous state. On top of this, alchemists intentionally used deceptive language in their texts to hide their secrets. Also, alchemists use the same symbolic language in texts that are entirely philosophical or theoretical as they do in ones describing lab work. Most alchemists, however, agreed on several basic concepts and principal stages of the Opus, which evolved over the centuries but remained framed by a mystical, mathematical system of number symbolism derived from the ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras.

“Make a round circle out of the man and woman, and draw out of it a quadrangle, and out of the quadrangle a triangle, make a round circle, and thou shalt have the Stone of the Philosophers.”

---*Rosarium Philosophorum*

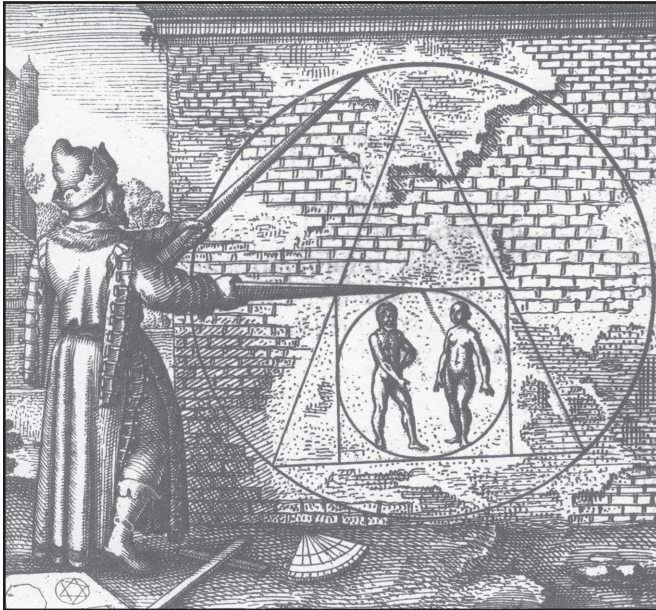


Figure 1. *The Geometry of the Opus, Atlanta Fugiens, 1618*

Chapter 1: Numbers

One: Unity or Oneness

Oneness is represented by the *Materia Prima* (first material), the single, invisible, indestructible substance, from which all things derive and to which all things return. It was also known as the *Anima Mundi* (world soul), the *Quinta Essentia* (essential fifth element) and the *Unus Mundus* (one world). In the Tarot, we can equate it to the World card.

Alchemists also called the initial substance or raw material that would become the subject of the *Opus* the *Materia Prima*. Although in this raw state, the *Anima Mundi* was not yet released. In the Tarot, this is related to the Magician. If it is used in this way, then the final product of the *Opus* may be called *Materia Ultima*.

In its primal state before creation, the *Materia Prima* is called the *Massa Confusa*, or Chaos, on which the world of form was imposed. This relates to the Fool.

Ruland's *Lexicon of Alchemy*, published in 1612, lists 134 different definitions for *Materia Prima*, many of which contradict each other.

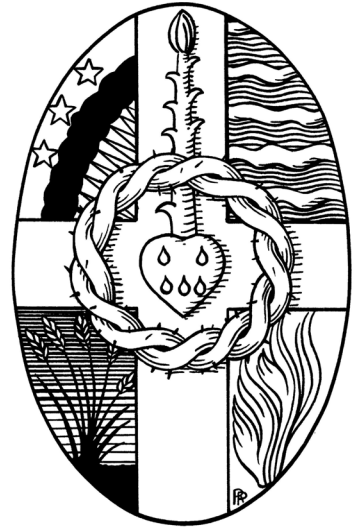


Figure 2. Rendering of the Philosopher's Stone from the *Harmonic Mystic*, 1636

Two: the Balancing and Reconciliation of Duality

The alchemical *Opus* is a process of transmutation in which opposite polarities are combined, separated, and recombined to attain a state beyond duality. The polarities can be listed in masculine and feminine pairs. It is obvious that similar dualities are found in the Tarot trumps.

Table 1. Duality

Masculine	Feminine
King	Queen
Red	White
Sun	Moon
Gold	Silver
Day	Night
Light	Dark
Lion	Eagle
Fixed	Volatile
Unwinged Serpent	Winged Serpent
Sulphur	Mercury
Air & Fire	Earth & Water
Warm & Cold	Dry & Moist
Active	Passive
Dry	Wet
Above	Below

Three: the Three Essences

Besides being composed of elements, early alchemists believed that there were two essences or principles found in all matter, which they labeled Sulphur and Mercury (not to be confused with the elements sulphur and mercury, which would be composed of the essences like any other material). When Sulphur and Mercury were combined with earth in various levels of purity and impurity the seven metals were formed. As the first to were thought of as operating in earth, the famous alchemist

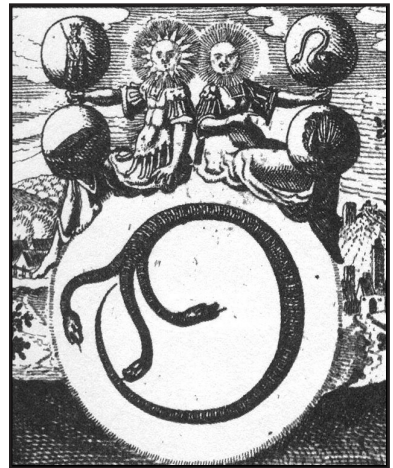


Figure 3. *The Two, Three, and Four, Philosophia Reformata, 1622*

Paracelsus (1493-1541) added Salt, representing earth, to the two and created the theory of the three essences: Salt, Sulphur, and Mercury. These three were thought of as the body, mind, and spirit of any substance and as these can be related to Plato's triple soul. I have already related the three essences to the three groups of seven cards of the trumps in my book the *Tarot: History, Symbolism and Divination*.

Table 2. Correlations for the Three Alchemical Essences

Salt	Body	Soul of Desire	Magician to Chariot
Sulphur	Mind	Soul of Will	Justice to Temperance
Mercury	Spirit	Soul of Reason	Devil to World

Four: the Fourfold World

The alchemists believed that everything in the sublunar world was composed of four elements, ordered from the bottom up, from the most dense to the most active: Earth, Water, Air, Fire. Plato and Aristotle added four qualities to the theory. Two of each of these qualities were shared by each element and this allowed transformation to happen. The alchemists also related the four to four liquid qualities in the body and other fourfold systems. In the Tarot the four elements are related to the four minor suits and in the Trumps to the four temporal rulers and to the four Evangelists on the World.

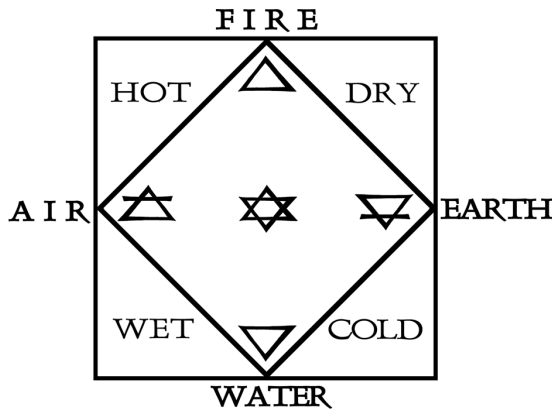


Figure 4. The four elements and qualities

Table 3. Elemental Attributions

Element:	Water	Air	Earth	Fire
Qualities:	Cold & Wet	Hot & Wet	Cold & Dry	Hot & Dry
Humor:	Phlegm	Blood	Black Bile	Yellow Bile
Season:	Winter	Spring	Autumn	Summer
Organ:	Brain or Lungs	Liver	Spleen	Gall Bladder
Type:	Phlegmatic	Sanguine	Melancholic	Choleric
Classical Characteristics:	calm, unemotional	courageous, hopeful, amorous	despondent, sleepless, irritable	easily angered, bad tempered
Evangelist:	John: Eagle	Matthew: Angel	Luke: Bull	Mark: Lion
Tarot Suit:	Cups	Swords	Coins	Staffs

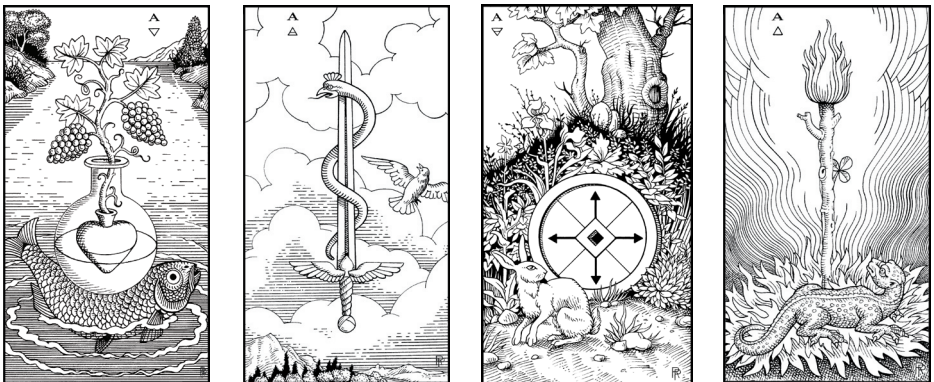


Figure 5. The Alchemical Tarot Aces

Besides the four elements, the Opus was divided into four stages and each was characterized by a color. These can also be related to the trumps.

Table 4. Four Alchemical Stages

Nigredo	Black	Magician to Devil
Albedo	White	Tower to Moon
Citrinitas	Yellow	Sun to Judgement
Rubedo	Red	World

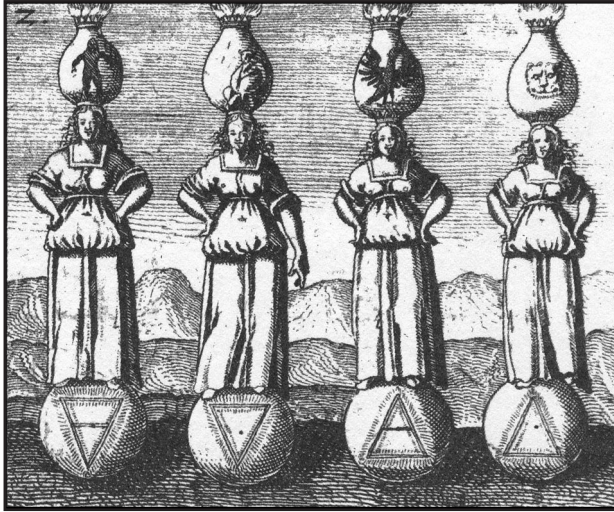


Figure 6. *The fourfold Opus, Philosophia Reformata, 1622*

Five: the Quinta Essentia

Besides the four elements, the alchemists believed in a fifth element which is actually the Anima Mundi or Materia Prima interacting and vitalizing the other four. This is known as the Quinta Essentia, the origin of the word quintessence. This hidden substance is exposed when the Philosopher's Stone is created. The fifth element may also be thought of as Ether, the incorruptible substance that the planets and stars were thought to be made of.

Seven: the Ladder of the Planets

In ancient cosmology, the Earth was believed to be a motionless body in the center of the cosmos and the stars were seen to circle the earth in a fixed group from east to west. Against this backdrop, there were seen to be seven brighter objects that moved independently from the stars. These were the seven planets of the ancients, which included Luna, Mercury, Venus, Sol, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. The ancients believed that these planets were seven gods and that they formed a ladder to the heavens that mystics would climb while in a trance in order to reach Heaven and receive gnosis or enlightenment.

The alchemists equated the planets to seven metals, which they believed could be transformed, one to another, from the most impure, lead, to the purest, gold. The alchemists also thought of the chemical processes in the Opus as a ladder leading them to gnosis and would compose lists of seven principle processes. These lists, however, would differ from one text to another, and are arrived at by combining several process under the name of another until the list is reduced to seven. The list in Table 5. is only one possible example.

Table 5. The Seven Planets, Metals, and Processes

Sun	Gold	Tincture
Moon	Silver	Coagulation
Mercury	Quicksilver	Distillation
Venus	Copper	Putrefaction
Jupiter	Tin	Calcination
Mars	Iron	Sublimation
Saturn	Lead	Solution



Figure 7. Rendering of the Envenomed Dragon, L'Azoth des Philosophes, 1659

Twelve: the Zodiac

Because the Opus was referred to as the year and thought to go through the twelve signs of the zodiac, alchemists sometimes made lists of twelve principle chemical operations that comprised the Opus instead of seven. The twelve signs of the zodiac were also equated to twelve chief substances.

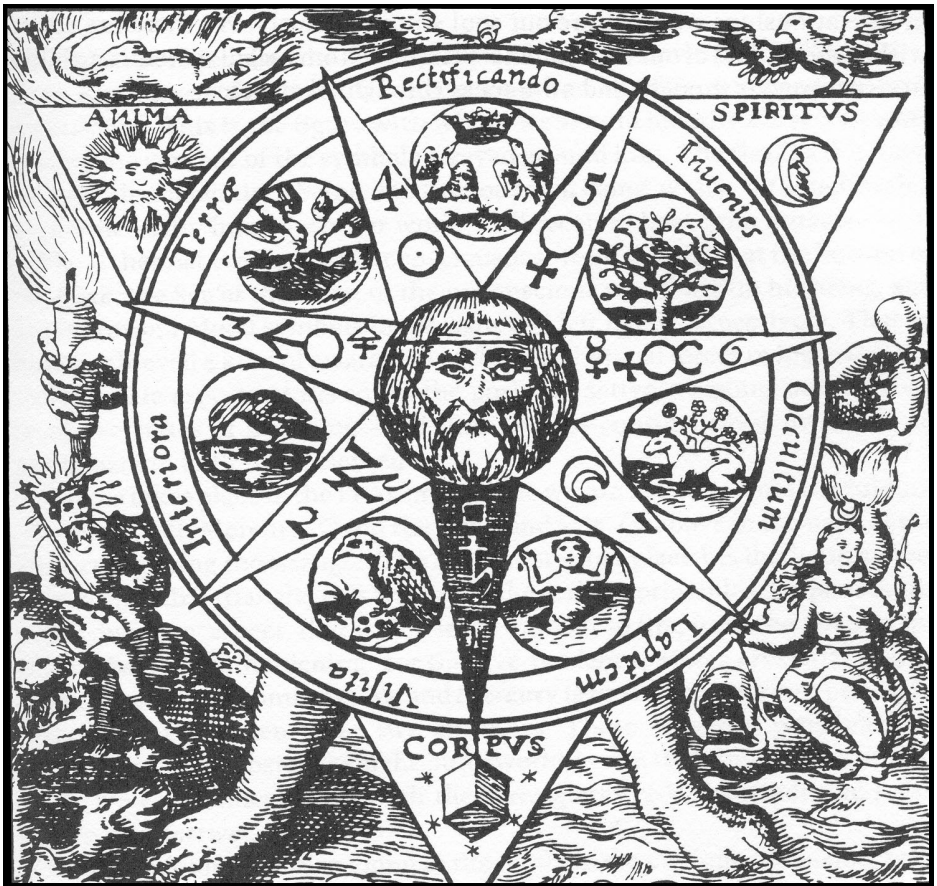


Figure 8. *The Principles of the Opus*, Museum Hermeticum, 1625

An Alchemical Mandala

Figure 8 is an alchemical mandala from the *Museum Hermeticum*, 1625, that contains references to all of the symbolism that we have been discussing. In the center, we see the face of the alchemist, framed in a triangle, with the symbols of the three essences placed at the corners: clockwise from one o'clock, Mercury, Salt, and Sulphur. The larger triangle, outside the circle, depicts their relationship to mind, body, and soul, and to Luna, Earth, and Sol. Within the circle, there is a seven-pointed star with the symbols of the seven planets/metals assigned to the points: starting at one on the bottom, Saturn/lead, Jupiter/tin, Mars/iron, Sol/gold, Venus/copper, Mercury/quicksilver, and Luna/silver. Between the points, are circles containing images that symbolize seven alchemical operations, from death or putrefaction on the bottom left to rebirth or resurrection on the bottom right. The inscription around the circle reads, "Visita Interiora Terrae Rectifando Invenies Occultum Lapidem (visit the interior of the earth and in purifying you discover the hidden stone). The Initials of this sentence spell Vitriol, the Secret Fire.

Notice that the alchemist has one foot on the sea and one on land representing the Wet and the Dry but also Water and Earth. The element Air is symbolized by the feather in his left hand and Fire by the candle in his right. Above his head, are wings representing Ether. In the lower corners, we find the Red King, with the Sun on his head, sitting on a lion representing Earth and the White Queen, with the Moon on her head, sitting on a whale, representing water. In the upper corners, are a salamander for Fire and an Eagle for Air. Because they are assigned to the corners in this way, they form a mystical pattern called a quincunx and the alchemist is in the quintessential position in the center of this design. Below the lion, there is a dragon in a cave, a symbol of the Secret Fire, which is a hidden form of the Quinta Essentia and the answer to the puzzle posed by the inscription on the circle.

Chapter 2: The Major Arcana

By correlating each card in the Tarot's Major Arcana with alchemical images, *The Alchemical Tarot* transforms this suit into a text for the alchemical Great Work or Magnum Opus, which describes the creation of the Philosopher's Stone, the magical substance that reportedly could cure any illness, prolong life, change lead into gold, and turn an ordinary person into a sage. Each card is a step or material in the process. The alchemist, represented by the Fool, begins with the Materia Prima, represented by the Magician, and culminates by merging with the Anima Mundi or divine consciousness, represented by the World.

To understand and appreciate the alchemical symbolism of each card it is recommended that one study each image individually, from the start to the finish. For each trump, the alchemical material or process that it represents is listed and discussed as well as the color stage it falls into and its significance in the Opus. The symbolic and mythological content of each symbol is also discussed with an emphasis on its psychological and mystical meaning. For each image, an alchemical source for the illustration is depicted and others are listed in the text. For further study in this area, please consult the bibliography at the end of the text.

To fully integrate the alchemical symbolism and engage *The Alchemical Tarot* as a vehicle for the Magnum Opus one must go through the trumps once again from the start to the finish, but this time enter into each image in meditation. This is a process that can take many months. Starting with the Magician, contemplate each image and visualize it as a doorway that can be entered into in active imagination. Through this process the archetypes in *The Alchemical Tarot* will directly become one's teachers.





The Fool

The Fool represents the neophyte alchemist, who begins the Opus, and ultimately will persist to the end. To obtain the Philosopher's Stone, the alchemist must learn to maintain and balance the adventure, honesty, and sincerity possessed by the novice with the wisdom acquired by the adept. He must never lose his sense of awe or wonder as he pursues the ultimate truth. In Zen, this discipline is called "beginner's mind."

The Fool is based on the alchemist on the bottom of the third page of Michelspacher's *Cabala, Mirror of Art and Nature: in Alchemy*, 1616.

The Fool is blindfolded to signify his ignorance, not blindness. He does not yet recognize the *Materia Prima*, the first substance needed for the Work. It exists everywhere, but, although the Fool can see it, he does not realize its value. As a result, he risks stumbling about in darkness. The hare is his guide and leads him into the dark interior of the earth, which signifies the first black stage of the Opus, the *Negredo*.



Figure 9. *Cabala, Mirror of Art and Nature: in Alchemy*, 1616



I The Magician

The Magician does not represent an alchemical process because he is the matter of the Great Work. He is the Anima Mundi, as is the end result, seen in the World card. He is the tail swallowed by the ouroboros, the circular serpent. He is argent vive, living silver, the basis of all metals. He is the Materia Prima, the subject and first matter of the Philosopher's Stone, and the seminal ingredient in all things. With the Materia Prima, we begin our alchemical transmutation.

This image is influenced by the images of Hermes in the *Mutus Liber* (The Silent Book), 1677. Hermes, as the Magician, is the interface between heaven and earth and embodies the Hermetic axiom, "As above, so below." He commands and unifies the four elements, and is the power that unifies opposites, symbolized by the red and the white serpents on his caduceus. In alchemy, he is considered both masculine and feminine. The staff of his caduceus is green because it is unripe at the beginning of the Opus.

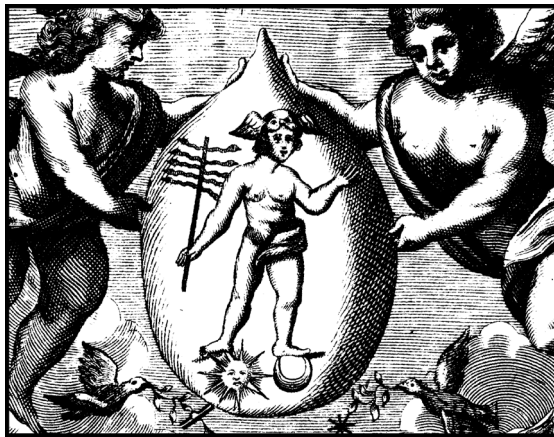


Figure 10. *Materia Prima*, *Mutus Liber*, 1677



II High Priestess

The High Priestess begins the alchemical process called dissolution, in which the *Materia Prima*, symbolized by the Magician, is dissolved and separated into its four elements, Water (the High Priestess, feminine soul), Earth (the Empress, body), Air (the Emperor, mind), and Fire (the Hierophant, masculine soul).

The High Priestess is the Moon to the Hierophant's Sun. As a symbol of Water, she represents intuition. Therefore, she expresses what cannot be expressed in words, an esoteric spiritual knowledge, which is not found in books, but comes from direct experience and from initiation into the mysteries. Like the mysteries of life

hidden in the womb of the Great Goddess, the wisdom of the High Priestess is hidden. Thus, her book is closed, and she is silent. She beckons to lead us to a gnostic, or personally realized, spirituality, but once we are at her gateway we must discover her secrets for ourselves by solving her riddles and deciphering her symbols. To show that her wisdom cannot be put into words, she holds her finger to her lips, a gesture borrowed from the image of the *Soror Mystica* (mystical sister), in the *Mutus Liber* (The Silent Book), 1677.

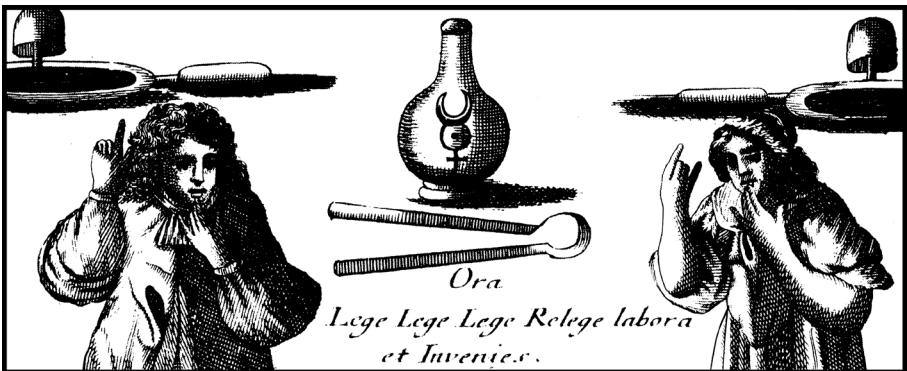


Figure 11. *The alchemist and the Soror Mystica, Mutus Liber, 1677*



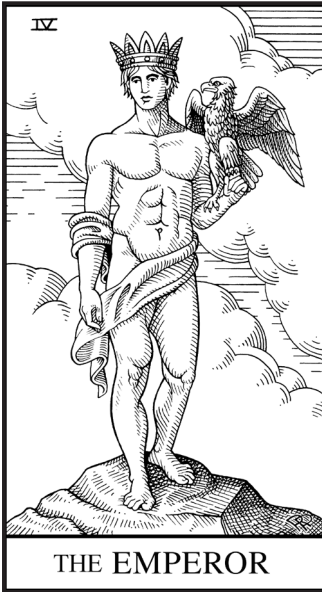
III The Empress

The Empress continues the process of dissolution of the *Materia Prima*, begun by the High Priestess and represents the element Earth in this process, which is related to the sensation function. Besides Earth, alchemically, the Empress represents the alchemical vessel, which nurtures the creation of the Philosopher's Stone. She is related to the earth mothers or great goddesses found in mythology. She is the embodiment of attraction and fertility.

The Empress is based on images of the White Queen found in *Anatomia Auri* (Anatomy of Gold), 1628, *Atalanta Fugiens* (Atalanta Fleeing), 1618, *Philosophia Reformata* (Philosophy Reformed), 1622, and other texts. As a symbol of Earth, the Empress is the expression of feminine energy grounded in the physical. She nurtures three kingdoms in her womb--animal, vegetable, and mineral. In this image, the child represents the animal kingdom. The vegetable and mineral kingdoms are represented by the vegetation and rocks surrounding the Empress.



Figure 12. *The White Queen, Anatomia Auri, 1628*



IV The Emperor

Like the Empress, the Emperor continues the process of dissolution of the *Materia Prima*, which was initiated by the High Priestess. Whereas the Empress is the expression of feminine energy grounded in the physical, the Emperor is the expression of the masculine physical, which correlates to the element Air in the process of dissolution. This in turn symbolizes thinking or intellect. Thus, the Empress is the body and the Emperor the spirit. The latter term, spirit, was used during the Renaissance to mean the mind.

This image is based on the engraving of the Red King found on the title page of *Anatomia Auri* (*Anatomy of Gold*), 1628, where he can be seen holding an eagle and a phoenix. In alchemy, the eagle represents the volatile, which transforms the fixed, that is, the agent that has the power to transform matter into its most refined state. The volatile is Hermes/Mercury, the living spirit of alchemy, who in this context is considered feminine. The phoenix symbolizes Sulphur, which is masculine and fixed. In harmony with the Tarot's Emperor, our Red King only holds the feminine symbol.



Figure 13. The Red King,
Anatomia Auri, 1628



V The Hierophant

The Hierophant's body and crown form a red triangle, the symbol of Fire. He represents Fire in the process of dissolution and, therefore, masculine spirituality--the Sol aspect of the soul in contrast to the Luna aspect represented by The High Priestess. This in turn is correlated to the feeling function. The Hierophant is crowned by a magnificent triple crown, which appears often in alchemical texts, and represents dominion over the three kingdoms: animal, vegetable and mineral, which have been nurtured by the Empress.

The small figures at the sides of the Hierophant represent the Emperor and Empress, who are being joined in sacred marriage. They are the earthly representatives of the celestial masculine and feminine principles symbolized by the Sun and Moon seen in the archways.

This image is based on a plate from *Senior's De Chemia* (Senior's Chemistry), 1702, which depicts an ancient statue of Hermes Trismegistus, the first alchemist, holding a mystical text. The book depicts three suns on the left and three moons on the right. Also on the left, is a double ouroboros like the one on the Wheel of Fortune card in *The Alchemical Tarot*. The model for the triple crown can be found in *Metamorphosis Planetarum* (Transformation of the Planets), 1663, and also in Michelspacher's *Cabala*, where we found the Fool.

The small figures at the sides of the Hierophant represent



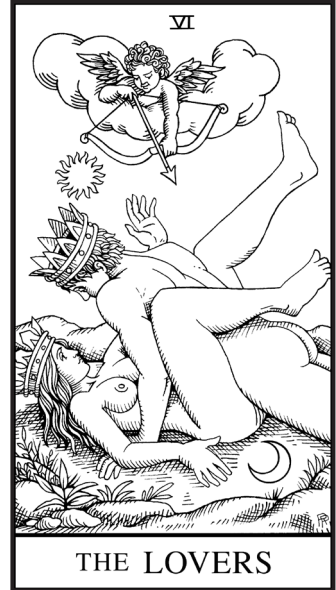
Figure 14. Hermes Trismegistus, *Senior's De Chemia*, 1702



VI The Lovers

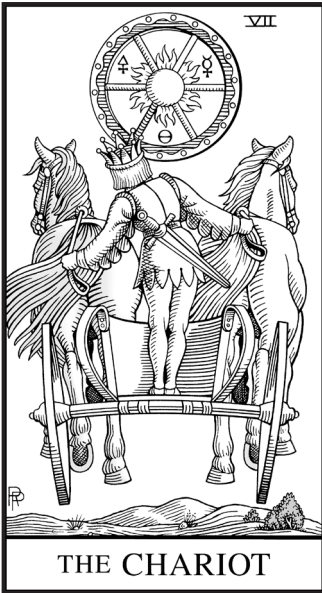
With the Lovers the dissolution of the *Materia Prima* is complete, and recombination back into unity occurs. Alchemically, the Lovers mark the first or lesser conjunction of the masculine and feminine principles, symbolized by the union of the Emperor (Red King) and the Empress (White Queen), with their spiritual essence, Sol and Luna, in the back-

ground. This is called the alchemical wedding, and was depicted in the texts as a wedding ceremony, or more often as a consummation of the marriage. In *The Alchemical Tarot: Renewed* this is depicted in two stages from foreplay to action.



In the 16th century *Rosarium Philosophorum* (The Rosary of the Philosophers), which is the model for this illustration, the conjunction of the King and Queen takes place in a water bath but here they are in a warm sand bath, representing the dry method.

Figure 15. *The Lesser conjunction, Rosarium Philosophorum, 16th Century*



VII The Chariot

The Chariot represents the alchemical process called sublimation, in which a substance when heated goes directly into a gaseous state, bypassing liquefaction, and ascends to the top of the alchemical vessel, where it condenses. Sublimation is an improvement in quality--but the alchemist must not be hasty about the process.

On the card, this process is symbolized by Phaethon, who in Classical mythology, was the son of Helios, the god who drove the Sun Chariot through the sky. To provide proof of his divine origin, Phaethon convinced his father to let him drive the chariot for a day. The boy, however, was too immature to handle the steeds. He

lost control, scorching fields and drying rivers. To avoid catastrophe, Zeus struck the rash youth with a thunderbolt causing him to fall head-first into the river Eridanus. This image is influenced by the solar chariot in *The Opus Medico-Chymicum* (The Chemical-Medical Work), 1618, and other texts, as well as my personal vision.

The impetuous Charioteer, who may also be thought of as the offspring of the King and Queen, marks the beginning of the ascension on the Wheel of Fortune, corresponding to the figure on the oldest Fortune card who says "I shall reign." Like the ascending figure, he sees his goal in front of him, the Internal Sun in the center of the Wheel of Time, and rushes to achieve his goal. Surrounding the sun clockwise are symbols for Mercury, Salt, and Sulphur.



Figure 16. *Opus Medico-Chymicum*, 1618



VIII Justice

Justice weighs Fire and Water, balancing the masculine and feminine principles. Her alchemical process is disposition, in which the correct proportion of elements is determined by weight before they are sealed in the retort. The hilt of her sword bears the alchemical symbol for vitriol, the secret fire. Justice's scales are derived from an image of Roger Bacon weighing fire and water found in *Symbola Aurea Mensae* (Symbols of the Golden Table), 1617. Her sword can be found in *De Goude Leeuw* (The Golden Lion), 1675.

Justice, the first of the cardinal virtues we encounter, may be thought of as the death aspect of the triple Goddess of Fate. Justice can be traced to the Egyptian goddess Maat, who weighs the souls of the dead, and is the embodiment the eternal truth from which all things spring, and to which all things return. This relationship between Justice and the judging of the dead can be seen in some 15th century Tarots, in which she was placed at the end of the series of trumps, next to the Judgement card.

To the Greeks, fate was ruled by the three Moirai: Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos. They ruled over birth, life, and death. In *The Tarot of Marseilles*, these three aspects are symbolized by three monkeys running around Fortune's Wheel and the three Cardinal Virtues, found in the trumps, can be thought of as the three spiritual principles that bring wisdom to the monkeys' foolish cravings.

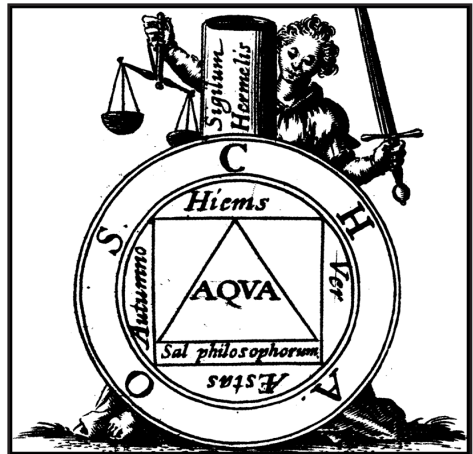


Figure 17. Disposition, *Tripus Aureus*, 1618



IX The Hermit

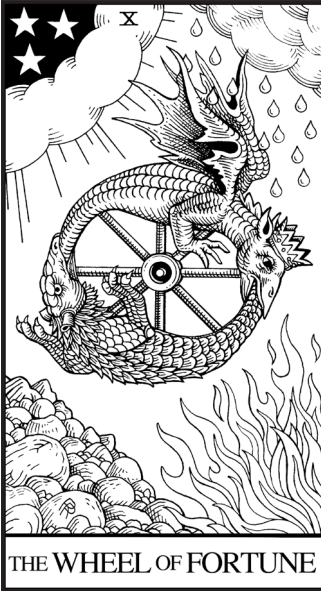
The Hermit's alchemical process is exaltation, in which the *Materia Prima*, now recombined and balanced, is dissolved into a purer or higher degree of itself.

This figure in early Tarot decks was Saturn, the heavy and dour god of time. In Classic myth, Saturn devoured his children just as his symbol, the ouroboros or serpent of time, (seen above in the sky) devours its own tail. In alchemy, Saturn represents lead, and rules the *Nigredo*, the black stage, which is the first stage of the alchemical *Opus*. On our card, this stage is signifi`ed by the Hermit's black companion, the raven.

Like the Hermits found in the *Musaeum Hermeticum* (Hermetic Museum), 1625, and *Atalanta Fugiens* (Atlanta Fleeing), 1618, the Hermit holds his lantern out in front in the *Diogenes* gesture, named after the 4th century BC Athenian philosopher, who was said to hold his lantern in this way while he searched for a virtuous man. This alchemical philosopher is searching for the *Anima Mundi*, whose footsteps he is following. The *Anima Mundi* is invisible but the wise Hermit knows he can find her by the evidence that she leaves.



Figure 18. *The Anima Mundi, Guiding Hermits, Museum Hermeticum, 1625*



X The Wheel of Fortune

This image is inspired by Eleazar’s *Uraltes Chymisches Werk* (Ancient Chemistry), 1760. It is the double ouroboros seen earlier on the Hierophant’s book and represents the Fixed (the scaly, masculine serpent), and the Volatile (the winged, feminine serpent), each swallowing each other’s tail. Alchemists believed that this process of transformation had to be accomplished over and over again as the work patiently spiraled to completion. This alchemical process is called circulation and the two serpents may be thought of as the ones that spiral Hermes’ caduceus.

According to scholar Robert Graves, Fortuna derived her name from the Etruscan goddess Vortumna, (she who turns the wheel of the year). This reference demonstrates that Fortuna’s wheel is related to the triple goddess of time and fate. The Greeks named the Fates: Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. Clotho, with her distaff, spins the thread of birth. Lachesis measures the thread. Atropos, the goddess of destiny, cuts the thread. These three aspects are represented on the Marseilles’ Wheel of Fortune card as three foolish monkeys. The fourth aspect, which is death and therefore beyond the stages of life, is depicted as the empty area at the bottom of the Wheel. The four male figures found in this section of the trumps, from the Chariot to Death, correspond to these stages on the Wheel. The three Cardinal Virtues, also found in this section, offer a complementary wisdom to each of the three monkeys.

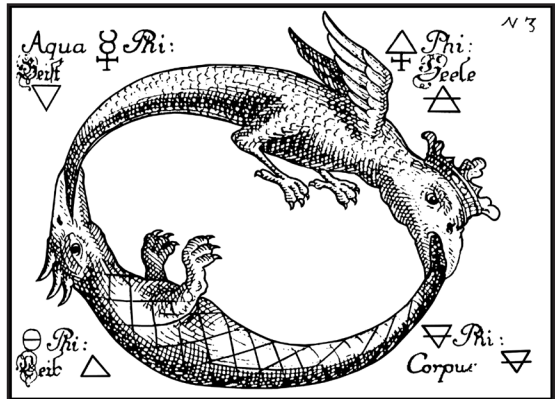
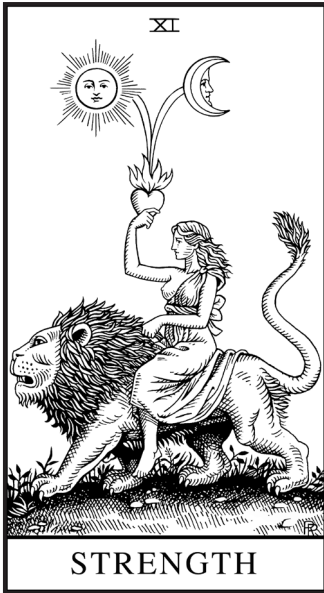


Figure 19. Double ouroboros, *Uraltes Chymisches Werk*, 1760



XI Strength

The alchemical process represented by Strength is fermentation, part of the process of exaltation exemplified by the Hermit. In the exaltation of matter, a ferment is incorporated with the matter to exalt it--it enters matter and brings it to a higher form. This is an analogy for the soul entering the body.

Strength also is the virgin, which is the second stage ruled by the threefold goddesses of fate. In Medieval myth, the virgin is the only one who can tame the unicorn, which is interchangeable with the lion in alchemy. The lion represents our untamed animal nature, our libido. In this illustration it is depicted as the green lion, which

as stated in *Rosarium Philosophorum* is Mercury, the deadly poison which will be transmuted into the healing elixir. The virgin represents our Higher Selves. The Higher Self tames the lower animal nature through love. Thus, Strength holds a flaming heart, the symbol of love and charity. The Sun and Moon are the higher aspects of the Lovers. They pour the masculine and feminine alchemical fluids into this heart vessel. This image is derived from an illustration found in *Tripus Aureus* (Golden Tripod), 1618.



Figure 20. Fermentation, *Tripus Aureus*, 1618



XII The Hanged Man

The alchemical process of the Hanged Man is calcination, in which the matter or body is suspended over fire or a corrosive agent to reduce it to white ash. The 15th century *Book of the Holy Trinity* found in the *Codex Germanicus* shows calcination represented by a man hanged from a similar gallows. The crucified serpent can be found in any text based on the work of the 14th century French alchemist Nicolas Flamel. It represents Mercury, which must be sacrificed to complete the Work. Here, the serpent becomes the rope that hangs the man.

In Italy, traitors traditionally were hung upside down as a humiliating form of punishment and the original name of this card was the Traitor. This card represents the sacrifice of both the persona and the ego that is necessary to continue with the Opus. A similar sacrifice is often found in myths that tell of a hero's journey, such as in the story Oden, who hung from the World Tree to gain wisdom. By hanging upside down, the Hanged Man is losing his gold, which represents the loss of worldly possessions, or self-esteem. Likewise, alchemical texts mention the need to sow gold into the calcinated ash during this process.

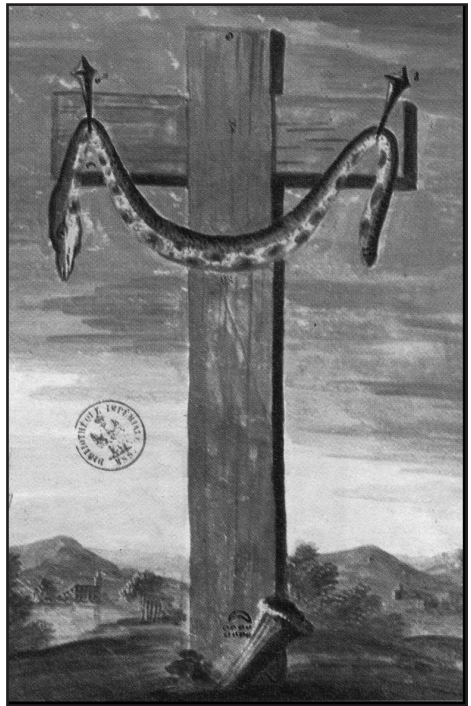
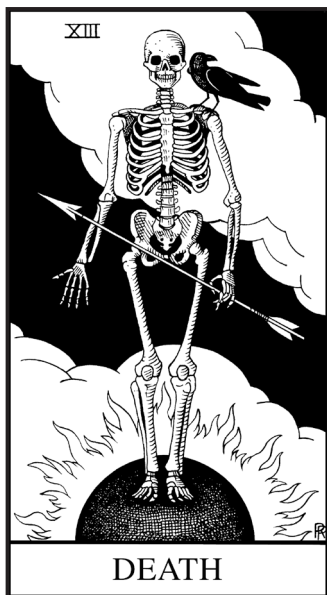


Figure 21. *The Crucified Serpent, Symbolism of the Operations of the Philosopher's Stone, 17th Century*



XIII Death

The alchemical process of Death is putrefaction, which, unlike the other processes, has no modern chemical counterpart. This is because, unlike the alchemists, we no longer believe that chemicals are alive and therefore we cannot kill them. In putrefaction, the composite material is dissolved (putrefied) in heated moisture. One method to accomplish this, is to grind up the matter, moisten it, and place it in a humid oven. The celestial essence will then separate from its elementary composition. Literally, the matter rots and stinks.

The Opus is a process that leads to the death and the resurrection of the material in the vessel and images of death can be found in most alchemical texts. This image is particularly influenced by the illustration of putrefaction found in *Philosophia Reformata* (Philosophy Reformed), 1622. Death, as a skeleton, stands on the alchemical vessel, which has been blackened in the furnace. At the center is a well-formed Nigredo, which is also represented by the raven on Death's shoulder. In mythology, a similar raven accompanies Morgana, the Celtic goddess of death. The skeleton's bow and arrow are Medieval symbols of death that have been substituted here for the more familiar scythe.

The Opus is a process that leads to the death and the resurrection of the material in the vessel

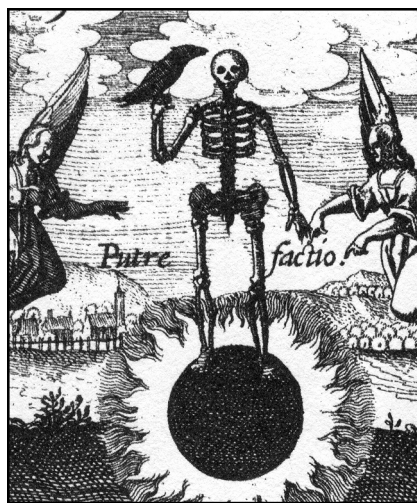


Figure 22. Putrefaction, *Philosophia Reformata*, 1622



XIV Temperance

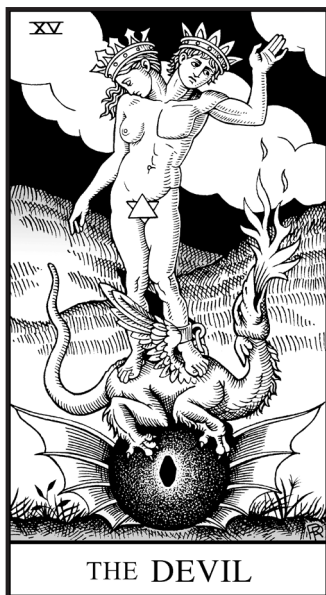
The alchemical process of Temperance is distillation. The image here is based on Mary the Jewess, the mythical inventor of distillation. She is also known as Bain-Marie, and appears in Michael Meier's *Symbola Aureae Mensae* (Symbols of the Golden Table), 1617.

Distillation is the extraction of material from its solution by forced evaporation. It is the oldest and most fundamental stage of alchemy--the whole process is continual distillation. Hence, Temperance is often called the alchemist. As distillation is based on the natural processes of evaporation and precipitation, this picture also illustrates the alchemical axiom, "Art imitates

Nature." Behind Temperance, growing out of a dunghill, is a rose bush. The rose is a symbol of alchemical perfection demonstrating that perfection emerges from chaos and that life comes from death. The white and red opposites are coming together in this bush.



Figure 23. Mary the Jewess, *Symbola Aureae Mensae*, 1617



XV The Devil

The alchemical process of the Devil is coagulation, in which matter is reduced to a solid state in a homogeneous body. That body is comprised of the Lovers, who have united the masculine and feminine principles into the single form of the hermaphrodite. They must now coagulate in darkness while awaiting rebirth. The Lovers are now trapped in Hell, chained to the Devil, but they can only go up from here. This image is based on one found in *Philosophia Reformata* (Philosophy Reformed), 1622.

The Devil, here, is portrayed by a red dragon sitting atop the same vessel we found in the Death card. In the center of the vessel, the substance has formed into a lump that is now blacker than black; the goal of the Nigredo has been reached. The dragon is an ancient symbol for the forces of darkness. In the Middle Ages, the Christian Devil, based on the description in the Bible, was commonly depicted as a dragon. States *The Bestiary* from the 12th century, “The Devil who is the most enormous of all reptiles is like this dragon. He is often borne into the air from his den, and the air around him blazes.” Saturn, the god of time whom we encountered in the Hermit card, also is called a dragon and the old serpent, a reference to his ouroboros symbol.



Figure 24. *The Poisonous Dragon*, *Philosophia Reformata*, 1622



XVI The Tower

The Tower represents the oven, or athanor, of alchemy in which the elixir is prepared. Alchemists often referred to their oven as a “tower,” and alchemical art portrayed the oven as a small tower. This image is inspired by the *Philosophia Reformata* (Philosophy Reformed), 1622, and the *Mutus Liber* (Silent Book), 1677.

The alchemical process represented by the Tower is the second or greater separation, or dissolution, which is accomplished through divine intervention. This is a higher order of the first dissolution, initiated by the High Priestess. The Tower card represents a breakthrough from the coagulated darkness or Nigredo of the Devil to the next

white stage, the Albedo. In the whiteness of the lightning strike we see the beginning of the Albedo.

For the two figures at the base of the tower, this moment is one of enlightenment and exhilaration. The man is the alchemist and the woman the soror mystica (mystical sister), the female alchemist who is the feminine balance to the masculine polarity that is crucial to the success of the Opus. They kneel in positions of exaltation, as though their prayers have been answered by the falling drops. The red masculine drop, falls to the male alchemist and the white feminine drop, to the female alchemist. The lightning has opened a gateway to the higher realms, and will become the ladder of the planets by which souls can ascend to heaven.



Figure 25. *The athanor, Mutus Liber, 1677*



XVII The Star

The Star is the alchemical process of baptism, the purification by water in which the blackness of the Devil is washed away into white. We are now firmly in the second stage, the Albedo or whitening. This image is based on two consecutive plates from Basil Valentine's *L'Azoth des Philosophes* (the Azoth of the Philosophers), 1659. The first depicts the Siren of the Philosophers and the second the Ladder of the Planets. The siren is the Anima Mundi depicted as Sophia\ Aphrodite, also known as Stella Maris, the Star of the Sea, the goddess who serves as psychopomp.

The Siren in the Star rises as a messenger from the depths of the underworld, or unconscious, represented by the sea. Her tails are spread like a Sheila-na-gig or a yonic statue of Kali, representing an open doorway to spiritual transformation through the mysteries of birth, death, and rebirth. Her body is literally the fountain of life. From her breasts pour two streams, one of blood and the other milk, combined with the sea water they form the alchemical trinity, sulfur, mercury and salt.

The red or masculine symbol is here united with blood, suffering, death, and fear, and the white feminine symbol with milk, nurturing, life, and hope. The Siren, as the source of both these streams, represents the calm state that lies beyond fear and hope. She represents the tranquility that is necessary to begin the ascent.



Figure 26. Rendering of the Siren of the Philosophers, *L'Azoth des Philosophes*, 1659



XVIII The Moon

The Moon does not represent an alchemical process, but symbolizes the medicine, the White Stone, which is a result of the process. The White Stone is the culmination of the Albedo, or whitening. It is not the Philosopher's Stone, but is the mother of the stone. What is missing is the masculine seed. The Moon is waiting for her lover brother, the Sun, to join her in the final conjunction that will make the Red Stone of the Philosopher's. She teaches us patience and the need for rest.

This image is inspired by the title page of Michael Maier's *Viatorium* (Wayfarer's Guide), 1618, and another image of the Moon Goddess

found on the title page of the *Musaeum Hermeticum* (Hermetic Museum), 1625. The Moon is depicted as the lunar goddess, Diana, who is always accompanied by her hounds, which provides an explanation for the two dogs depicted on the Marseille's Moon card. Also on that card we find a crab coming out of a pond. Here, we find the crab placed in the sky instead and we can see that it represents the constellation Cancer, which is the Moon's native sign. Diana's dogs represent the passive and active principles: one is dark and sitting, one is light and standing. Diana holds the waxing moon while the waning moon is in the sky, for she rules over all the lunar phases. Her torch relates her to Diana Luciferus, whom the ancient Romans saw as the beacon of the night. She stands at the edge of the waters of the unconscious.



Figure 27. Diana, *Musaeum Hermeticum*, 1625



XIX The Sun

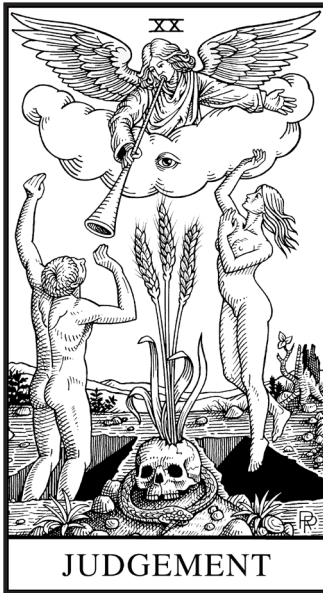
With the Sun we reach the third stage of the alchemical Opus, the Citrinitas or yellowing. In this stage, the yellowing is caused by a beautiful light that illuminates the vessel. This is not the physical sun but the internal Sun that is even brighter. The internal Sun symbolizes enlightenment.

In this stage the spiritual Sun rises to join his lover, the Moon. The Sun and Moon are the souls of the Emperor and Empress, and are here joined in the second or greater conjunction, the hieros gamos, or sacred marriage. As Sol and Luna, they are joined under one crown, the symbol of domination and mastery. They have

reached the goal of the Opus and the internal Sun rises between them. As it says in the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, "They embrace themselves and couple together, and a perfect light is begotten between them, which there is no light like through all the world." This stage can be equated to the merging of the unconscious and conscious mind, a conjunction that Jung finds essential to the state of health and maturity that he calls individuation. This image is based on the illustration of the greater conjunction found on the title page of *Le Voyage des Princes Fortunez*, (the Journey of the Fortunate Princes), 1610.



Figure 28. Greater conjunction, *Le Voyage des Princes Fortunez*, 1610



XX Judgment

This image, inspired by Michael Meier's *Tripus Aureus* (Golden Tripod), 1618, depicts the alchemical process called the reviving or resurrection, in which the matter of the work, which was killed in the Nigredo, is revived by the power of the Stone which can be seen on the final card, The World. This is demonstrated by the Stone's ability to transmute base metals into gold. To the alchemist base metals are dead, and become resurrected by becoming gold, the highest degree of their perfection.

Judgement may also refer to the process called multiplication, or projection. Here, the alchemist reaps what he has sown. The operation is not performed by the alchemist but by the Stone itself. Essentially, the substance has been killed and burned in the earth, and now is reborn and multiplies like grain. The power of projection is multiplied to infinity, beyond time. In the mystery of Osiris, the Egyptian god of the underworld, grains of sprouted barley were sown in a coffin. When they sprouted, Osiris was said to have arisen. The central symbol in this image, the grain sprouting from the skull, is a reference to this mystery and we can see the same reference in the image from *Tripus Aureus*. In the center of the ouroboros of time, the place of immortality, life emerges from death, the grain, and like Osiris or Christ, is reborn from the earth.



Figure 29. Resurrection, *Tripus Aureus*, 1618



XXI The World

The World brings us to the culmination of the Great Work. Alchemically, the World is the final red stage, the Rubedo, in which the Rudy Stone of the Philosophers is formed. The Stone, symbolized by the heart, is composed of pure spiritual essence, the heart or soul of the world (Anima Mundi), which is personified as the nude woman in the center. In alchemy, the Great Work is called the work of the woman. In Renaissance art, nudity represents truth and the spiritual ideal. We can see that she is central to the four elements and it is her that gives them life. The Rose represents the perfection that the Stone engenders and the red drop is the healing elixir.

This design is influenced by several alchemical images, including the mandala representing the Philosopher's Stone in *L'Agneau's Harmonic Mystique*, 1636, and the image of the Anima Mundi in Solidorius' 18th century Parisian text. It is also influenced by the similarity of the Marseilles' World to these alchemical images and by my personal visions engendered by these illustrations.

The design is a type of mandala known as a quincunx, in which four elements are placed in the four corners and a fifth, most important element, is placed in the center. The quincunx is pre-Christian but in Christian iconography it was used as the structure of the Christ in Majesty icon, which depicts Christ on his throne in the center and the symbols of the



Figure 30. Rendering of Anima Mundi, Solidorius, 18th Century

four evangelists, the lion, bull, eagle, and man, in the four corners. Alchemists made use of this icon as a symbol of the *Quinta Essentia* (the essential fifth element) but more often they would substitute images of the four elements for the four evangelists (correlated through their astrological association with four fixed signs of the zodiac). They would also substitute the woman representing the *Anima Mundi* for the figure of Christ. The *Marseilles' World* depicts the *Anima Mundi* as the woman but retains the symbols of the four evangelists. Here the evangelists have become the four elements.

The *Anima Mundi* is what was hidden but is now exposed. She is the mother of the elements and the spiritual essence of matter. She has the power to cure any illness, to prolong life and conquer death, to transform any substance to its highest state, and to make a person one with his or her Higher Self.



Figure 31. *Rendering of Quinta Essentia, Glanville Le Proprietaire-des Choses, 1482*

The companion CD-ROM contains full-size color versions of the next 5 figures.

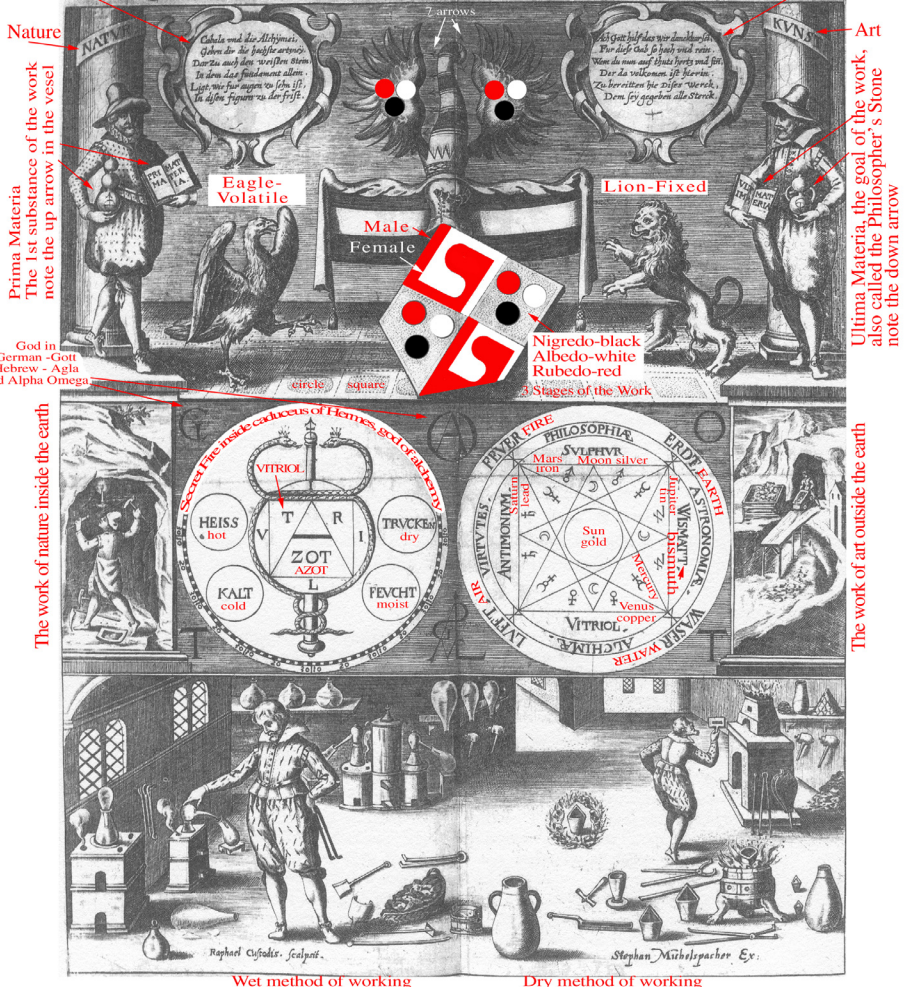
Chapter 3: The Cabala by Steffan Michaelspacher

1. Mirror of Art and Nature:

Cabala and Alchemy Give thee the medicine most high,
 Also the Stone of the Wise. In which alone the foundation lies,
 As is plain before thine eyes betimes in these effigies.

O God help us be grateful for this gift sublime and pure
 The man whose heart and mind Thou openest, Who is perfect herein,
 To prepare here the Work, to him may all strength be given.

1. Mirror of Art and Nature
 this page is about duality and the alchemical quest to overcome duality

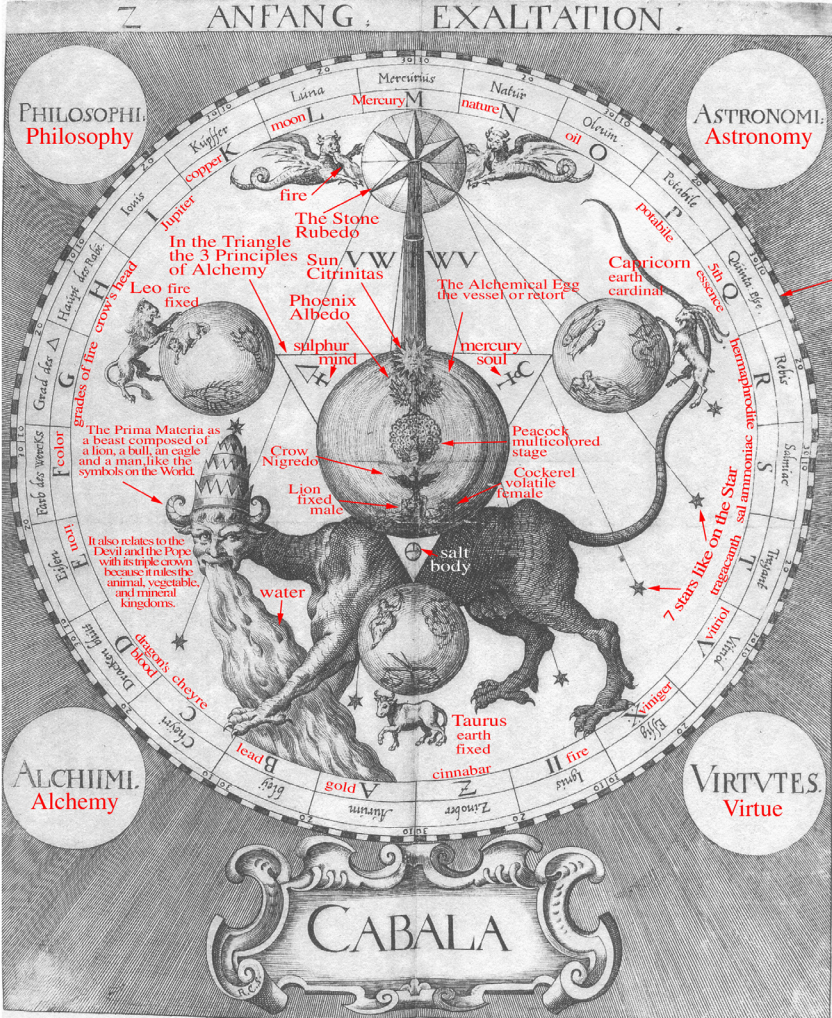


The three levels of the drawing represent, from the bottom up, the body, mind, and spirit of the work.
 The great work of alchemy is called the *Magnum Opus*.

2. Beginning Exaltation

The Cabala, Mirror of Art and Nature: in Alchemy by Steffan Michelspacher

2. Beginning Exaltation
this the black Nigredo stage It exposes what is poisonous and need to be transformed
it also is concerned with triplicity



This is a quincunx like the World card. Instead of the four elements or four symbols of the evangelists in the corners it lists four disciplines that are the cardinal elements of the Magnum Opus. In the center, the sacred location, it has the retort, the alchemical vessel with symbols of the stages of the work.

Each of the 23 letters of the German alphabet is being connected to an alchemical symbol, like the Hebrew letters in the Jewish Kabala.

Because of the influence of the Christian Kabala By 1616 alchemy, Kabala, and magic were interchangeable terms.

3. The Middle Conjunction

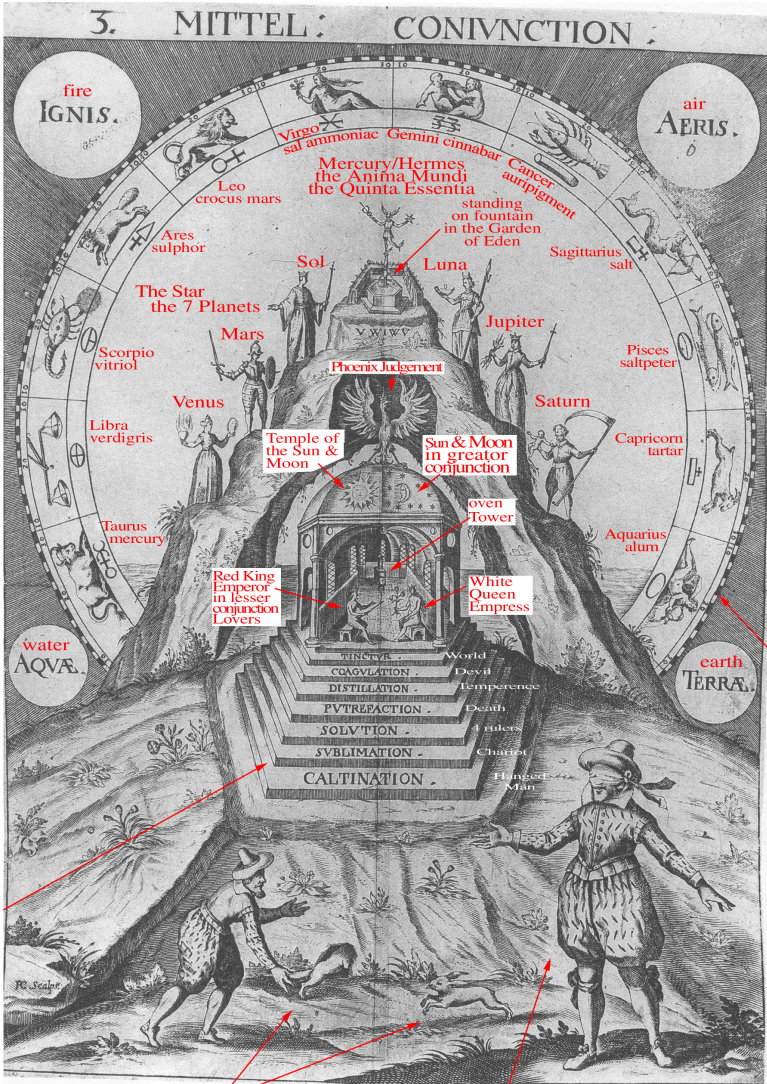
The Cabala, Mirror of Art and Nature: in Alchemy

by Steffan Michelspacher

3. The Middle Conjunction, the Albedo or White Stage

This is a quincunx with the four elements in the four corners and the alchemical mountain in the sacred center.

Like the 7 stars on the Star the work has 7 steps, or alchemical processes. That lead to the Temple of the Sun and Moon in the interior of the Celestial mountain.



The Opus is the work of the year, the circle of the Zodiac, which is like the Wheel of Fortune

Like the Magician, the rabbit guides the alchemist into the dark beginning of the journey, the nigredo.

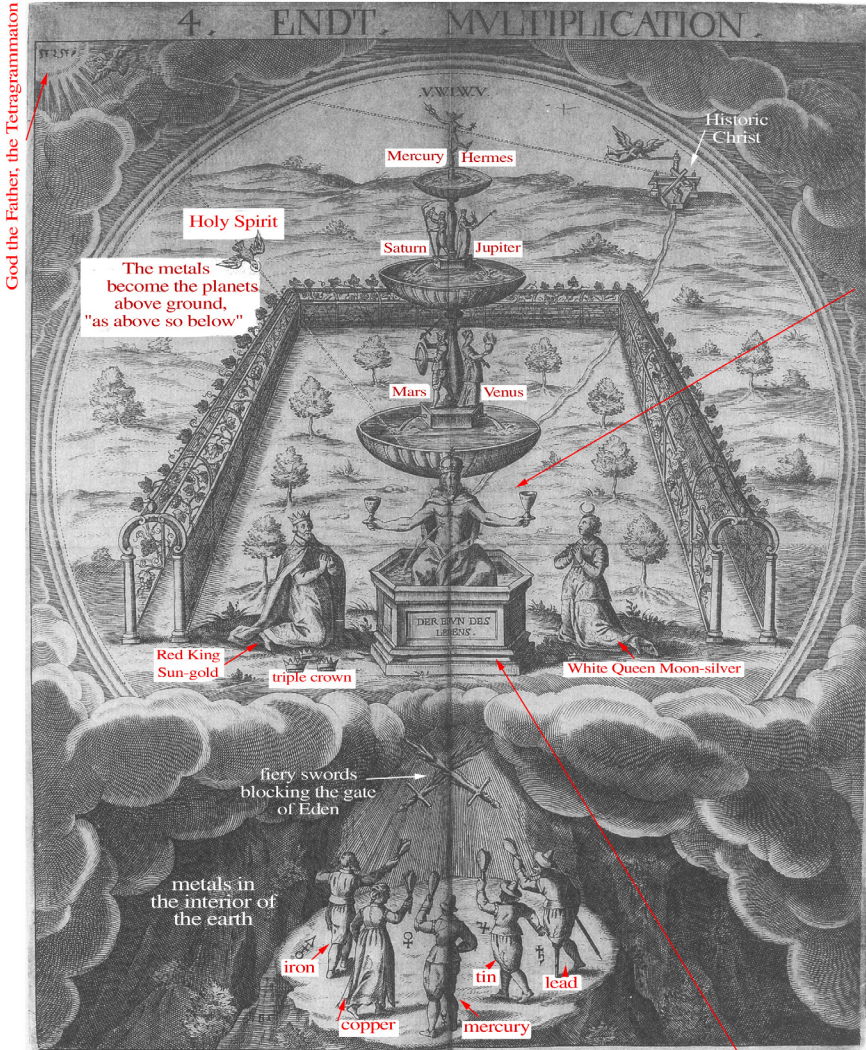
The blindfold signifies ignorance. Like the Fool the alchemist starts from a place of not knowing.

4. The End Multiplication

The Cabala, Mirror of Art and Nature: in Alchemy

by Steffan Michelspacher

4. The End Multiplication,
The Rubedo, the Red Stage when the Stone is Found



The fountain in the center of Eden is the Holy Grail filled with Christ's blood but it is also the Red Elixir, the Philosopher's Stone. The fountain is a hexagon which symbolizes the squaring of the circle.

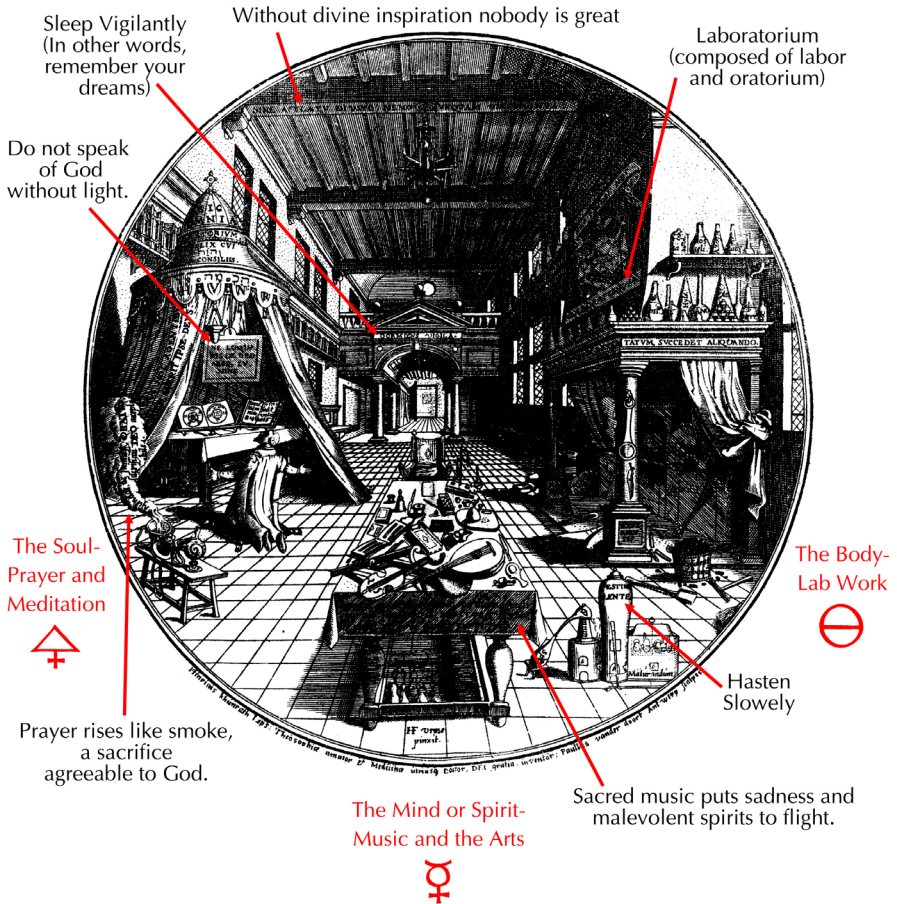
Chapter 4: The Amphitheater of Eternal Wisdom

Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae,

(The Amphitheater of the Eternal Wisdom)

Heinrich Khunrath, 1602, Plate 5

Depicts the Body, Mind/Spirit, and Soul of Alchemy



Chapter 5: Readings

Goal Oriented Transformation Spread

by Robert M. Place

This spread is designed to take you from where you are to a desired goal.

Start by asking the cards to describe a desired goal. Then shuffle and cut the deck.

Row 1: Lay out 3 Cards to represent the goal. Leave plenty of room for 7 layers.

Row 2: Shuffle and ask where you are now in relation to the goal. Cut and place the cards at the bottom leaving space for 6 rows between.

Rows 3-7: The remaining rows are steps in the process of how to get to the goal. Shuffle and cut for each stage and lay out cards until you reach the goal.

Read each stage from the bottom up to the goal at the top.

1	1	2	3
7	19	20	21
6	16	17	18
5	13	14	15
4	10	11	12
3	7	8	9
2	4	5	6

The Goal

The Steps to the Goal

Where You
Are Now

Goal Oriented Transformation Reading

for Brian on 5-14-08

Brian's Question: I work in Information Technology and I was just out-sourced. I asked the cards what's going on. What I keep getting is I need to take care of the spiritual side of the house first and I don't know what they are talking about. The goal would be finding my spiritual path.

P.S. I am also in Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous so I am spiritual, not religious. I gave up on my Catholic upbringing and am following shamanism and paganism for my spiritual path but have not had much luck in defining it more.

1

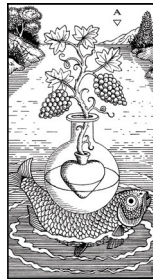


LADY OF STAFFS

THE HERMIT

The Goal

7

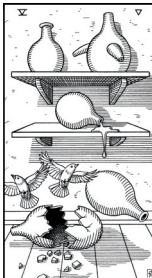
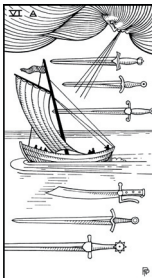


THE MOON

The Steps to the Goal



6

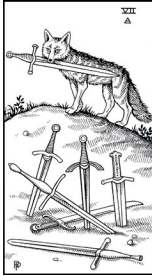


THE TOWER

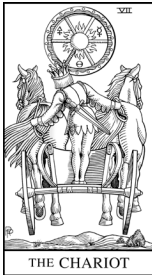
Goal Oriented Transformation Reading (Continued)

for Brian on 5-14-08

5



4



3



2



Where You Are
Now

Open Ended Transformation Spread

by Robert M. Place

This spread is based on the work of David Grove, the New Zealand psychologist who is famous for his journeywork technique. Grove discovered that when a question is repeated six times the answers are different each time and a transmutation takes place as each answer uncovers a deeper layer of wisdom. The seventh layer is a statement of the wisdom that has been gained. The labels for each layer are based on Grove's work.

Ask a question pertinent to your life. Shuffle; cut the deck; and layout three cards, left to right.

This is the first layer on the bottom called the Proclamation.

7	19	20	21	What I Know Now
6	16	17	18	Phoenix
5	13	14	15	Crash & Burn
4	10	11	12	Wobble
3	7	8	9	Reinforcement
2	4	5	6	Expansion
1	1	2	3	Proclamation

Ask again; shuffle; cut the deck and layout three cards above the first row. This is the second layer called the Explanation.

Continue shuffling and cutting the deck for each layer, which is always laid above the last layer.

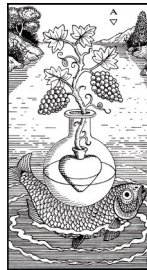
Consult the digram for the title of each layer.

Open Ended Transmutation Reading

for Debi on 5/14/08

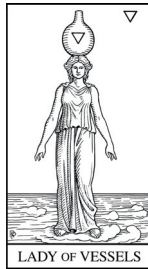
Debi's Question: What insight can you give me about my inner being and transformational journey that began over one and a half years ago and is still in progress?

7



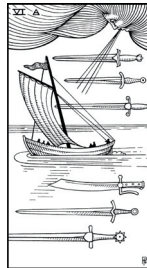
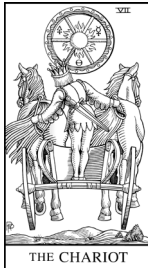
What I Know Now

6



Phoenix

5



Crash & Burn

Open Ended Transmutation Reading (Continued)

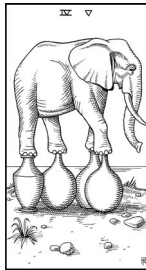
for Debi on 5/14/08

4



Wobble

3



Reinforcement

2



Expansion

1



Proclamation

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