

THE ALCHEMY IN SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

Nanci Shanderá, Ph.D.

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Part I: Calcination

Burning with fever, drowning, being swept into a tornado, being challenged by the opposite sex, magically transforming into something or someone else, flying (without an airplane!), breathing underwater, being touched by an angel. Is this tonight's television lineup? Is it another Harry Potter adventure? Or do these things sound strangely and personally familiar?

If so, it is because these are experiences common to those on the spiritual pathway and ones that can appear in both dream and waking realities. Each are good examples of the seven stages of alchemical transformation. Ancient alchemists put various metals and substances through rigorous procedures that were intended to turn the original material into gold. This art-science was a metaphor for what we typically experience in the stages of personal spiritual growth.

In this, the first of seven articles on the alchemical process, we will explore the foundational stage called *Calcination*. Dennis William Hauck, author of the profound work, *The Emerald Tablet: Alchemy for Personal Transformation*, and one of the world's few practicing alchemists, defines the value of Calcination as "beneficial because [it exposes] deeper layers of our essence while rubbing away the false person." This is certainly what most of us might think we want, but direct involvement in the process is often a frightening thing.

In Calcination, we come face to face with the ego's resistances. It tries to protect us from the unknown by maintaining the status quo, the old way, the "safe" way, even if outdated. Calcination, over which the ego has no control, makes us feel like all we hold dear is threatened. It's a death-like experience. We may even feel like we are being burned at the stake - the "stake" being the ego's investment in keeping things "safe." Calcination burns away what is no longer needed, including ego-based beliefs and ways of being. It initiates us into a long process of releasing illusion and making space for the true self to emerge. And this takes place when our "container" is cleared of old limitations.

In an alchemist's laboratory, Calcination involves heating a substance until it is reduced to ashes. In personal transformation, we may experience it as deep depression or despair, hopelessness or defeat. These reactions prove how the ego controls our lives by enforcing the believe that there are only certain ways to be and anything outside those ways are dangerous. When the ego's hold over us is "reduced to ashes," we feel we are dying and there is nothing left to hold onto. The despair lies in our lack of experience in realms of expansiveness, those worlds being so much greater than our fears have allowed.

Please don't misunderstand what I am saying about the ego. The ego serves a necessary purpose in helping us deal in our human world. But insecure

and unhealthy egos create a chaos within us that prevents us from growing the way our Souls intend. Calcination is only the beginning of the creation of a healthy, productive, supportive ego structure. But first the ego must be “deflated” before it can be reconstructed in a way that sustains and maintains the guidance and desires of the Soul.

The ego snaps to attention when its boundaries are weakened and tries to protect us by overinflation. By creating emotional reactions of anger, outrage, shock, and making others wrong, the ego reestablishes its influence over how far we can open our hearts to the situation at hand. There is an old saying that it is far worse to take offense than to give it. That means that someone who makes an insulting comment can usually just walk away, while the recipient of the offending remark often stewes for days, weeks - sometimes a lifetime - over the supposed affront. Once again, the unhealthy ego maintains its control by making us believe we have been wounded and deserve the retribution that usually never comes.

We can work most wisely with Calcination by surrendering to it, learning from it and allowing it to take us closer to our Soul’s desires by burning away the barriers and obstacles to living a whole and happy life.

In my next article I’ll be discussing the second stage of alchemical transformation called “Dissolution” - where the ashes from Calcination are immersed in the waters of emotion and spirit.

Until then, keep in mind that the hotter the fire, the greater the potential. Blessings.

Part II: Dissolution

In Part I of this seven-part article, we considered the first stage of alchemical transformation, *Calcination*, where our egos are shocked, disillusioned, deflated, thrown into the abyss, torn to shreds, or burned to ashes. We discussed the purpose of this as preparation for personal awakening, the state of consciousness where we know who we are, why we are here, and how we are an integral and essential thread in the cosmic tapestry. (Check your ego on that statement: does it recoil at the idea of being “*just a thread?*”)

This time we will approach the second stage of alchemical transformation: *Dissolution*. This is the experience of being dissolved into the waters of emotion, often experienced as tears, crying, sobbing, feeling totally lost and fearful of the unknown. It comes about as a result of the ego’s deflation in the Calcination stage. As the ego’s rigid control over our lives is released *temporarily* (this is not fully completed without many such experiences which ultimately create a new pattern), we experience underlying structures created to protect our more fragile aspects of beingness which are based in fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear of feeling. Fear of emotion. Fear of revealing who we truly are. Fear of *being* who we truly are. The ego leads us to believe that if we reveal who we really are we will be somehow harmed, rejected, denied, criticized, or annihilated.

The origin of this ego-based belief system lies in our childhood, when we

were truly unable to protect ourselves in most areas of our lives. So we “hired” our egos to protect us by creating an “I don’t care” attitude, seeming cold and aloof. Or we might have used emotional displays to confuse and control others, and in so doing, we were protected from being vulnerable. Or we could have chosen to be a “nice girl or boy,” which is a way we live on the edge of our sensitivities, but without revealing the full range of our feelings in order to remain “safe.”

In *Dissolution*, we make active use of the waters of emotion in order to “re-own,” or take charge again of, our natural emotions - in other words, it takes *expression* of emotion to *access and integrate* the original and necessary emotional core within us. It’s the alchemical process of dissolving the ashes of *Calcination* in water (emotion) so we may further refine the raw material of our Soul. In this second stage, we are seeking to bring back to conscious presence the emotions we repressed because of fear of others’ reactions to them. Most of us learned very early that society tends to judge emotions harshly, unless they are “acceptable,” such as love. But *authentic* Love encompasses all with the compassion of understanding and acceptance. It is not exclusive, qualifying the only ways we can experience it. In a state of true Love, we would know that emotions take two basic forms: Soul emotions and human emotions. Soul emotions are Love, grief, anger, sadness, and joy. Human emotions are feelings based in jealousy, rage, pettiness, fear, competition, manipulation, etc. But before you nod and say these human emotions are “the bad ones,” look again. If Love encompasses all, then it must include these difficult feelings. Perhaps the unconditionality of such a Love allows for the human state of beingness to experience “learning” emotions, those which are presented to us here on earth to help us to evolve and awaken. The purpose of such emotions is to challenge and strengthen us in our resolve to grow and to seek the highest possible outcome of every experience.

You may still be questioning why the emotions of the Soul would include grief, anger, and sadness. Most tend to think the more difficult emotions would not exist in higher realms of consciousness. But in research done on the between-lifetimes states of consciousness (I recommend books by Michael Newton, Ph.D. and Joel L. Whitton, Ph.D., on this subject) it has been found that a majority of subjects reported feelings as being a necessary part of the learning experiences between one life and the next. There is a “life review” in this period, where the Soul looks at the life just experienced. If we did anything to regret, we feel sorrow, remorse, or anger at having done so. These feelings help us make changes that help us to evolve. Our Soul may then choose to re-embodiment in the next lifetime in a way that corrects and rebalances the wrong that was done.

Whether on the Soul level or in the human realm, emotions are essential parts of our beingness. Rejected, they become heavy, dark aspects of ourselves that we live in fear of. We put great energy into trying to fool ourselves and others into believing that we don’t have those unacceptable feelings. The fascinating thing about running away from our fears is that when we finally are

confronted by whatever it is that we've protected ourselves against, the thing itself is *never* as bad as our fears had us believe. Many people feel amazed, and even a little foolish, at how much time, effort, and energy they put into hiding a feeling, only to discover that when re-integrated, it made them feel whole. The fear of being annihilated by an emotion is the fear of feeling alive. Isn't it funny what we do to avoid it and yet pursue it anyway?

Next time, we will work with the third stage of alchemical transformation called *Separation*, which is the experience of further sifting through the ashes to discover what is truly valuable in our lives.

Until then, consider your emotions and how valuable they really are to you. Perhaps it's time to unconditionally accept them.

Part III: Separation

In this seven-part article, we have discussed the first and second stages of alchemical transformation, *Calcination* and *Dissolution*, where our egos are shocked, disillusioned, deflated, or burned to ashes, then washed clean and thrown deeply into the secrets and gifts of the emotions.

During the process of *Dissolution*, we actually *use* the emotions to access *more* emotion - the kind that is authentic and valuable in our quest for wholeness. As we move on to the third stage of alchemical transformation, *Separation*, where the emotions and other parts of us are brought to conscious awareness, it is time for us to review all the areas of our lives in regard to what is important and what is not. The ego in this stage is temporarily quieted - most often by the passion of emotional expression within the second stage - so we can contemplate our priorities without the ego's interference. This is a level of intellectual exploration, but not a hiding place, which so often is where we go when upsetting emotions begin to emerge. We all have experiences where we were frightened by the intensity of feelings expressed at difficult times of our lives and how we have "escaped to our heads," thinking it would protect us and even "get rid of" those pesky emotions. Did it work for you? Probably not. Using the intellect this way is actually a *misuse* of it, the pure purpose of which is to *complement* and *enhance* the emotional states and expand us to wholeness. It is the graceful yet powerful dance of the masculine forces of the intellect with the feminine forces of feeling - neither is attempting to outdo or overshadow the other, but rather perform the sublime dance of surrender to the other. It is the entry into the *Hieros Gamos*, or the Sacred Marriage, which takes place at the fourth - and higher - levels of transformation.

On human levels, the exploration of *Separation* is a key to manifesting the kinds of relationships we dream of since it is a preparation stage for the harmonious communion between the inner masculine and feminine. It is also a stage that most of us avoid when embarking upon the quest for a new relationship. For instance, if we have recently ended a relationship, the tendency is to either go out immediately to fill the void with another one, or to hide away, closeting ourselves from further hurt. In either case, most people will ignore the

most necessary of tasks before entering a new partnership: the inner “housecleaning” which offers the opportunity to become aware of what was learned in the previous relationship. This is a crucial step because without it, we will repeat the old patterns in the new experience and then wonder why they keep happening. It’s like (and this is for those of us who remember what phonograph records were!) trying to listen to a beautiful symphony on a record that is dusty and caked with grime. Before the music can shine through, it must be cleaned.

Separation gives us the opportunity to learn from the past and make decisions based upon what we learned. Of course, doing it well requires courage - every stage of transformation requires this. I believe it is the main ingredient for a successful and fulfilling life because it prepares the way for us to walk with purpose and integrity. To separate ourselves from something that we sense is no longer healthy or appropriate takes a brave heart. It may be a troublesome person in our lives - a lover or boss, perhaps - who we know is not good for our particular Soul need. And this conclusion must be based upon a great deal of deep inner work before we can consciously, and with high intention, extract ourselves from that person. Otherwise, it’s just an excuse to remain unconscious and to keep blaming our problems on others. We can test this by reviewing how many times the same thing has happened over and over between us and that person. This is caused either by our blindness to or rejection of our own issues, or by the repetition itself being a clear sign that all is not well in this relationship and it is time to leave it. If it is the latter, it may mean a sacrifice is needed before our courage can get us through and keep our eye on the correct path.

It is far easier and requires no courage to stay in a relationship or to keep working for the same abusive boss than it is to leave. Leaving means we’re on our own. We are not shored up by our wobbly hopes that somehow things will get better. No, we’ve tried that a million times and it hasn’t worked. Something new has to be done. A symbolic sacrifice of what has supported the dependency must be made. I always recommend a solemn ritual that evolves from our own creativity before embarking on the actual sacrifice of the person or situation we must leave. This ritual will connect the human part of us with our Soul selves and guarantees that the connection will be made ready for the next stage of alchemical transformation. A ritual for this purpose may be as simple as lighting a candle, speaking to that person from our Soul self about the reasons for parting, then doing a symbolic cord-cutting to finalize the decision. Or it may be elaborate - it depends on our sense of what will impress our inner needs the most. For it is from within that change is made and when the outer determination of mind combines with the emotional expression within a ritual, the desired result has already been made manifest on higher planes. All that is needed from that point is to go forth in the world and accept the new experiences that are awaiting.

In the next article, we will work with the fourth stage of alchemical transformation called *Conjunction*, where we experience a sacred marriage deep

within us and one that gives us a glimpse of the wonders of wholeness.

Until then, consider your what is important in your life and what is no longer necessary or conducive to wholeness. Do some inner housecleaning. Those dust buffalos need to go!

Part IV: Conjunction

In the last three articles of this series, we've explored the first triad of alchemical transformation consisting of *Calcination*, *Dissolution*, and *Separation*. These three stages are the lower, earthbound processes of spiritual evolvment. In order to be fully spiritual and whole, we as humans *must* be grounded on the earth plane, accepting our human experience as a necessary and exquisite part of awakening. This idea is not accepted in many of the world's religions, where it is taught that spiritual perfection is attained by denying and rejecting things of the earth, whether they be the human body or the earth itself. These beliefs imply that things of the physical plane have no value - some religions teach that our bodies are to be reviled and the earth a place of devilish seduction.

Alchemy's "motto" is "As Above, So Below," meaning that things of the earth are intrinsically interwoven with the heavens. Alchemists and shamans seek the balance between the two and from that balance, they effect transformations and healings. The symbol of the World Tree, found in many mystical traditions such as the Kabbalah, demonstrates that to be whole, we must have our branches in the heavens, but our roots in the earth, with the trunk as a highway flowing between the two states.

The fourth stage of alchemical transformation is *Conjunction*. It can be related to the chakral system where the heart is the fourth center of awareness. The heart can also represent the World Tree - they are both a central "clearing house" where the spiritual meets the physical and blends and harmonizes them so that higher states of consciousness may be integrated.

In *Conjunction*, we bring together the work done in *Calcination*, where the ego was burned to ashes, in *Dissolution*, where the emotions became more fully integrated and accepted without the ego's interference, and in *Separation*, where we discovered what was of value in our lives and let go of anything that wasn't.

All of this is essential groundwork for the experience of *Conjunction*, where we are called to a higher way of relating to ourselves, to others, and to the world. It is a coming together, or *Heiros Gamos*, the Sacred Marriage, of all that we are, have been, and will ever be. It brings us face-to-face with our Soul's essence. Purpose takes on a new meaning. As a result of having been humbled in the first three stages (I like the image of being on one's knees before the majesty and power of the Soul.), we are made ready to accept this marriage on deep inner levels of being.

This might manifest as a new attitude toward ourselves and others. If *Separation* set the stage for us to quit a meaningless job, for instance, we may

be inspired to begin doing what we always wanted to do. In the conjunctive state of consciousness, there are fewer fears. The old “shoulds and shouldn’ts” are absent, or at least less powerful. Life takes on a new joyousness, laughter is more present. There is a sense of delight and excitement about the most mundane of activities because we *experience* acting in partnership with our Soul.

In *Conjunction*, we begin to have a delicious taste of who we truly are. We get a glimpse of our authentic Majesty and our eternal connectivity to all that is. Because this state is centered in the heart of compassion, we view ourselves with far more acceptance and love. This allows us to lovingly understand that the “mistakes” and ways of being in the past were “grist for the mill” - necessary practice for the greater consciousness yet to come. For example, if we have always battled with low self-regard, we can begin to perceive it as a self-regulating mechanism within that prevents us from integrating and manifesting our Majesty until the time is right. My spiritual mentor, Brugh Joy, M.D., teaches that the greater the pain/depression/low self-esteem/limitation/etc., the greater the gift. When I share that with my students for the first time, I delight in the blank or confused looks on their faces because this statement holds the power to throw them into a perception of their world they have never considered before. To regard ourselves as not terrible after all but actually in the process of incubating a great and unique talent or gift to share with the world is mind-blowing for most people.

Conjunction poses questions for us that require choices about where we go from that point. The state of *Conjunction* is a pleasant enough place to be, but it also urges us to press on in our journeys so that we may at some future time come full circle and once again, touch into the heart’s full rapture, each next time expanding the experience in greater magnitude.

Next time, we will surrender to the heart’s urgings and move on to the fifth stage of alchemical transformation called *Fermentation/Putrefaction* (Oooh! That one sounds scary, right? We’ll see!), where we taste again the sacred fires in *Calcination*, but this time to a more finely-tuned degree. It is where we review what we have experienced while we are pulled into the more intense fire that creates the fermenting process that refines us further by urging us to die to old ways.

While looking at *Conjunction* in your life, review your capacity for compassion toward others and yourself. The Sacred Marriage means being “in [a state of] love with” yourself and all your aspects, and with Life Itself. It may be time for you to practice the art of laughing at yourself non-judgmentally - you may be surprised at how delightful it is!

Part Va: Putrefaction

For many who work deeply with spiritual transformation, the goal may seem to be the healing of and freedom from past pain and suffering. When this goal appears to have been reached, there’s a tendency to believe that there will be no further difficult experiences. We think that because we’ve worked so

hard, we've cleared it all out. Our life from that point will be idyllic and serene.

This is such a common experience of lulling ourselves into yet another type of unconsciousness. This sets us up for the shock of an even more challenging experience wherein the ego is again thrown into the fiery cauldron for further transformation. In alchemy, this is called the *Putrefaction-Fermentation* stage. Here, we again face the ego's insistence on dominance, but there is an important difference in the quality, intensity, and *source* of the experience. Unlike the experience in the first stage of *Calcination*, where we were alone in our battle with the ego, this time we sense another force assisting us. Although the initial part of this fifth stage, *Putrefaction*, can be very disturbing, and we may be thrown into a pit of depression or despair, it feels like we are being held up, supported, even encouraged in the process.

As I write this article, I am actually experiencing my own Putrefaction. It began after the holidays and at first I thought it was just the after-holiday blues, which would lift in a day or so. This was not the case. In fact, over the past several days, it has actually intensified. I am having untypically disturbing dreams and feeling depressed.

But the depression is markedly different than those of the now distant past. This time, I have no desire to shut myself down or run away as I used to do years ago, when depression was a constant companion. (In his Alchemy Module One, Dennis William Hauck says "...the alchemists would never reach for the Prozac at this stage," pg. 50.) Rather, I'm watching the darkness reveal parts of myself both known and unknown to me. It is a disconnection from the past, allowing it to die, rot and ferment so it's inspired from higher sources rather than from my earthly self - the new material is emerging from the rich and fecund darkness in concert with my Soul.

Some of this material is downright frightening, but there is a distinct presence within and beside me that is *not* depressed or disturbed by the dream content. It is that part of me that I know as my Soul. And my awareness of its palpable presence is due to my not having shut down. This time, I put no blinders on so my vision is not limited. In times past, I closed down my ability to *be with* the material in the depressed state so completely that I couldn't see anything other than the darkness itself, which I used as confirmation that I was valueless.

This time, I am sitting in the midst of bleak, dark, despairing emotions but not chasing them away or misinterpreting their presence as a commentary on my worthiness. My Soul is *here* - it's always been here, but this time I'm welcoming and celebrating its connection with me in the dark. Its purpose is clearly not to "make nice" or pull me prematurely out of my wretched state, but to just *be with me*. This not only encourages me to keep on sitting with the material, but also serves as a model of trust and wisdom toward which I am growing. It presented itself to me in a dreamlike state this morning. I knew it was my Soul and it was moving toward me, emanating great light from its serene face, holding a small candle. It was clearly not there to ease what I was going through but rather to encourage me to continue and not give up.

In alchemy, *Putrefaction* presents us with gross, repulsive, disgusting, and loathsome stuff from within our deepest selves. It is like sitting in a rotting pile of garbage with the task of merely experiencing it, without judgment, without need for rescue, and without losing our power. This is a deeply creative process of being courageous enough to see all of our “stuff” without self-criticism, feeling sorry for ourselves, reverting to infantile need-fulfilling behaviors, or misinterpreting what is really going on. A graphic example of the process of *Putrefaction* is depicted in paintings of the Hindu goddess, Kali, in which she typically wears a necklace of rotting heads, brandishes a bloody sword, rests her foot upon a corpse and stands in front of a group of soldiers and skeletons performing a wild battle dance. The look on her face is one of absolute power - one that frightens the uninitiated and reveals the purpose of *Putrefaction* to the adept.

Putrefaction continues until it has “cooked” the material well enough for entry into the *Fermentation* aspect, where the substance takes on different action and begins a process similar to how rotted grapes become fine wine. After the devastating effects of *Putrefaction*, the ego is close to non-existent in its former state and has been transformed into an aspect of self that supports and strengthens now, rather than sabotaging. The experience of *Fermentation* can be quite intoxicating. Because the ego is not feeding us inaccurate interpretations of what this stage is, we can savor the headiness of the wine at the same time *commune* with the “spirits” in the “wine” of pure selfhood.

Next time, we will look at how *Fermentation* requires a further, finer stage of transformation called *Distillation*, in which we celebrate our Essence. It is a stage of delight and surprising knowledge.

Until then, I send anyone who is also experiencing *Putrefaction* at this time great support and blessings. Great things await us!

Part V-b: Fermentation

Last time I presented material on *Putrefaction-Fermentation* and told you I was currently in the *Putrefaction* stage. In his book, *The Emerald Tablet*, Dennis William Hauck defines *Putrefaction* as “the absolute suppression of ego....often perceived as a dark depression in which the former ruling principle of the personality must die to make room for a higher identity.” (pg. 115) Having moved through the *Putrefaction* stage and into *Fermentation* where my former identity was changed, I want to share more with you on that subject. I will discuss *Distillation* next time.

The dream I shared with you in which my Soul came to me, holding the light, heralded the beginnings of the sister process to *Putrefaction: Fermentation*. It felt like sliding from a smelly and distasteful pit of garbage into a silent temple, one devoid of anything except a stone floor, walls and ceiling. There was nothing to cushion my entry, nor to provide comfort as I sat upon the smooth, cool floor.

But there was a strong presence of wisdom, which told me to be cautious of feeling relief to be out of the garbage pit. It guided me to stay aware of what I'd just experienced, to apply the lessons learned in everyday life, and to remain open to what was to come for the process was not yet complete. As in the making of fine wine, after the grapes begin the period of breaking down their former structure (as in the experience of *Putrefaction*), the mixture must be transferred to another container (the newly developing self), where a catalyst is added to produce the final stages of fermentation (where a new identity and outlook is formed).

I moved into the stage of surrendering and allowing myself to be lifted out of the cauldron that contained all that defined me into a new one. Wisdom cautioned me to remain in a state of egoless surrender so that I was an empty and receptive vessel for the addition of the catalyst - that ineffable something that would ultimately produce the "spirit" within me. Hauck describes this as a process in which "new life is brought to dead, decaying matter." (IBID, pg. 113)

I began experiencing extremely strong guidance from my masculine, thinking aspect. It created a kind of schedule for me in which I would go about regular daily tasks but with a new, conscious awareness of *why* I was doing them. There was a natural falling away of those things that had no reason for being. Everything had a purpose and anything that did not, dissolved, making way for the catalyst to appear. As things fell away in importance, I realized that much of who I had thought I was was based upon many of those now dissolving matters. Although moving through new territory, it was intriguing to watch how the elimination of much of what I had previously held as so meaningful felt like a freeing, an expansion into the unknown.

(It's important to note here that while my masculine was guiding me to perceive differently, my feminine aspect was guiding me to remain open, receptive, and malleable to the upcoming changes. This is an apt example of how, after *Conjunction*, in which the Sacred Marriage of the feminine and masculine takes place, these two aspects work together in harmonious concert, to our benefit.)

Traditions in many cultures embrace stories about the transformational process. In the Celtic culture, for instance, a typical tale would be an Arthurian one, such as the legend of Parsival, who, in his search for the Grail, represents the *Putrefaction-Fermentation* stage, where the fall from grace occurs as the ego rots and falls away. Then, as a ripening, or maturing, takes place, the Grail becomes the catalyst as a *model* for living the enlightened life and not necessarily the sought-after boon itself.

It is not the goal that holds the gifts - it is the process itself. In *Fermentation*, if we can surrender to its winnowing, we are freed for new and higher ways to experience our lives. We cease being goal-oriented as a mad race for enlightenment. We act from an expansive knowledge of life, one that is inspired from the peak of our experiences rather than from the limited view from below. We no longer *hope* - we have *become* that hope. We see ourselves as part of an entire and greater fabric, rather than only an unimportant thread.

We *know* we are connected to all that is. The ego-based personality self is a thing of the past and no longer defines who we are or what we are doing. Yes, of course, we still have responsibilities and daily activities, but we perceive *and* experience them as only part of the entire picture rather than the picture itself.

In my *Fermentation*, I spent much time just watching. I observed how my new thinking process was affecting the outcome of everything. It was lifting my previous beliefs about spirituality, for instance, to a much higher plane of understanding. I was awed by what I was discovering and felt that I was once again a student, this time of the vaster and greater cosmic truths that I was not previously ready to embody. It was a strange and wonder-filled experience of being humbled so that the basic material of me could be reshaped into a higher resonance with my Soul as it relates to its union with all that is.

Until next time, may your catalysts be profound and your fermenting produce only the finest of inner wine!

Part VI: Distillation

“Your feelings and thoughts are the feelings and thoughts of the Whole Universe,” (from *The Emerald Tablet* by Dennis William Hauck). This statement describes the process of *Distillation*, where we become far more interested in the greater good than merely in our own. It is the transformational stage where we are spiritually and emotionally mature enough to merge with the collective conscious and unconscious without becoming devastated by what we find there. The reason we can keep our balance after having arrived at the Distillation stage is that the ego no longer controls us and we can therefore appreciate the mysteries of the collective - and personal - shadow material without the ego’s intrusion. (The shadow is that part of our own consciousness, as well as society’s, that holds the darker, rejected, denied, and powerful aspects. It not only holds difficult material that sometimes feels demonic in nature, but is also is the repository for our gifts, talents and Soul’s voice until such time as we are ready to fully take them on.)

Distillation brings the creative out of us. It encourages all that we are to manifest in balanced and serenely powerful ways. It heralds the entry of the influence of the higher forces and the balancing of those forces with the lower ones, which provide our groundedness, so crucial to wholeness. Someone once said that to be spiritually high all the time made us no earthly good. I see so much of the so-called “New Age” philosophies, as well as many religious ones, promoting the idea that our spiritual task is to transcend the body and earthly pleasures and problems, and move into an idealistic realm populated by angels and eternal joviality. These philosophies are based upon ages-old misconceptions about spiritual experience. These ideas imply that we are not capable of dealing with the reasons our Souls brought us down to earth in the first place. These philosophies would have us either become dependent upon intermediaries between us and our gods or look at life through very smudged rose-colored

glasses. The truth about life is that it is *exactly* what it is in every moment. It is childish to believe that there was some kind of cosmic mistake that gave us the parents we have, put us on a toxic planet, and dropped us off without a user's manual. Our infantile needs for remaining blind and rebelliously unresponsive to all the problems that our Souls chose life on Earth to experience keep us unconscious and unevolved.

Distillation takes us into higher realms of awareness, but because we have been through all of the purifications and difficult challenges in the previous stages, we have a finer appreciation of the purpose of those difficulties. A distilled person is able to walk in both worlds at once, without rejecting either. And - this is very important - a distilled person is *mature*. S/he does not expect life to meet egoistic expectations, nor does s/he view it as a devastating disappointment just because it doesn't meet those expectations. A distilled person would tend to perceive Earth as a "workshop planet," where we have the *blessed* (yes, I said *blessed*) opportunity to *really* grow. A Soul who chooses Earth as its experience has great courage.

A distilled person would *know* that the Soul, rather than the ego, was now guiding her/his life. A distilled person surrenders to the higher forces while celebrating and honoring the existence of the lower ones. A mystical symbol of this state of consciousness which appears in many spiritual and religious logos is the image of two triangles, one with its point coming down to either touch or merge into a second triangle whose point rises up to meet or merge with the other.

In the last article on *Fermentation*, I shared with you the process I had just gone through - a deeper burning out of the ego's influence and control over my life, particularly in regard to my creativity. As I began to emerge from the fermenting experience, I consulted my favorite tarot deck, *The Alchemical Tarot*, and drew the three of coins card in response to my question of where I was going from there. This card depicts a man at a desk doing some drawing or writing. He is seated by a window which looks out onto a lovely scene. Above the window are the alchemical symbols for mercury, salt and sulphur, which together represent wholeness. The card also illustrates the stability that is required in order for creative endeavors to manifest as a result of having combined the higher inspirations with the unconscious urge to create.

I was very pleased with this card because, over the next few weeks, it provided a confirmation of the value of the writing work I've been doing on these articles and the books I'm writing. From an ego-based viewpoint, I would have viewed this as personally gratifying since I had wanted to be an author since I was a little girl. But from the perception within a distilled consciousness, I understand the impact upon others that my writing will have, and that has become far more important than if it were merely for my own personal pleasure. (Don't get me wrong - it's *also* a great feeling to see what appears on the page as I write. But I am able to take on the primary purpose of my work as an offering to the world, rather than within the limited scope of only my personal life.)

A medieval alchemical drawing shows a well from which are emerging the masculine sun and the feminine moon. This depicts the process in distillation of arising from the depths of the lower work into a balanced relationship with both higher and lower aspects of being. Also in the picture is a pelican shown pecking at her breast until she draws blood that she then feeds to her young. This represents the sacred sacrifice we are asked to make if we are sincere in our intentions to become spiritually advanced. At some point we are required to make a sacrifice that benefits the greater good. It is important to understand that I am not talking about the soap opera type of sacrifice, with the heroine dramatically swooning with the back of her hand on her forehead. That kind of sacrifice is no sacrifice at all. It's just more ego drama. The true sacrifice is one based upon the origin of the word: it is to make a *sacred* act or, to make an act sacred rather than self-serving.

Next time we'll look at the last stage of alchemical transformation called *Coagulation*, which is the congealing of all earthly and heavenly consciousness within an individual. It moves us beyond even the ability to walk in both worlds found in Distillation and into a new consciousness that is a combination of both but that has become *one* distinct consciousness, no longer consisting of two aspects. It is what the alchemists call *The One Thing*. We may call it God.

Part VII: Coagulation

Wholeness is inexorably linked to holiness and, interestingly, the word "holy" has its roots in "hale," which means sound, whole, and happy. So many of us have been taught that holiness is a distant, mysterious, and unreachable state reserved those in the higher echelons of organized religion. I say phooey to that because being holy is a highly creative way of being that demonstrates that which cannot be politicized, organized, or exclusivized.

In the alchemical model of spiritual transformation, a holy person is one who has gone through all the lower stages: calcination (burning out the ego's control), dissolution (feeling and taking ownership of the emotions), separation (deciding what's important) - *many* times! - and has then moved into numerous explorations of the stage of conjunction to discover where one's heart is. After this basic work is solidly integrated, we are free to expand our determination to become whole through the stages of Putrefaction-Fermentation (where we experience wrestling matches with our inner demons), Distillation (where we become far more interested in the greater good than merely in our own, and finally Coagulation, which is where true wholeness/holiness is revealed. This may sound like it makes all the more difficult stages worthwhile - and it does. However, as Joseph Campbell might say in his Hero's Journey model of personal transformation, the end is just the beginning. For as we have strengthened ourselves in all ways and moved into the realizational state of consciousness, we also move into more responsibility to ourselves and our growth as well as to others and all of Life Itself. This is no resting place, other than on deep inner levels. It requires more responsiveness than ever before, more discomfort and

pain than when we were at varying degrees of unconsciousness if we slip off the pathway, and more vision of how our moment to moment decisions can affect entire universes. It is also filled with many moments of joy and expansive understanding and perception of life that we never experienced before.

In the previous article, I described Distillation as the stage where we are spiritually and emotionally mature enough to merge with the collective conscious and unconscious without becoming devastated by what we find there. A sure proof that we aren't truly as enlightened as we would like to think we are is when we *react* (as opposed to *respond*) to a situation as awful rather than full of awe and potential for learning. A change of perception and attitude is the key to being fully in command of our wholeness. When we are at the mercy of our egos or unredeemed emotional states, we are not free to see all available options. We tend to be myopic and react accordingly. And we usually think of these narrowly perceived situations as negative, bad, or threatening, so our reactions cause us to close up, defend, or attack. This prevents growth and it is certainly not an experience within a Coagulated consciousness.

A most important point to be made here is that few people reach the point of *complete* Coagulation. Most of us must continue to go through all of the stages again and again, each time further refining the golden essence within us. It takes time to become fully awakened. And the necessary key is that having a goal to become enlightened actually prevents most people from achieving it. For true spirituality has no goal other than to remember one's true nature. In the moments of experiencing that truth, we know that everything about us and everything in our world is perfect - not in the usually accepted definition of perfection because that's impossible - but everything is exactly as it needs to be in every given moment. It's all a part of the discovery.