

Spiritual Alchemy



Alchemical Brass – Part 1

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Brass is mentioned frequently in the writings of the alchemists. It plays an important role in initiating a process, which leads, in stages, to the production of gold. What spiritual truths could the sages of alchemy be inferring in their use of this word?

Brass is an alloy consisting mainly of two metals, copper and tin. Alchemists assert that by “metals”, they don’t mean physical ones mined from the ground. The alchemical amalgamation is rather a conjunction of the spiritual essence of the metals involved. It’s interesting that modern physicists can fuse an atom of copper to an atom of tin and produce gold.¹

One synonym for Brass mentioned ² by alchemists is Latten. It has exactly the same meaning ³ as כלי נחשת kali nachoshet, the brass vessels of the temple mentioned in the bible.⁴

נחש ⁵ "to shine" from which nachoshet is derived, also spells nachash, the serpent in Genesis. The serpent, who is described subtlest of the creatures in paradise, did not lie to Eve. He beguiled her through reason.⁶

The adjective subtle, has a root meaning "to discover", the same from which is derived naked, the word describing what Adam and Eve noticed most about their appearance after eating the forbidden fruit. Discover is also linked to words like essence, being and the color green.⁷ A green serpent is coiled around the tree behind the woman in key 6. We behold in the Lovers, an image that reveals the significance of that moment when Adam and Eve's eyes were opened.⁸

The color green also represents organic life. The plant kingdom is the most basic form of biological life. The green trees and living roots inform us this force is the foundation of the vital energy of living bodies. The wooden staffs of the Fool, and Hermit, as well as the wands of the Magician and Chariot represent this also. In other versions of tarot, wands appear as living branches, from which green leaves spring forth. The nachash then is the agent of the subtle, shining, essence of life, i.e. astral light.

On the crown of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt, a cobra emerges from center of the wearer's brow. This point on the anatomy spiritual alchemists associate with the Moon. It is identical with the third eye referred to by eastern yogis. The Lovers thus represents the moment the adept achieves astral vision. Indeed, every human being is "naked" to such a "seer", who can directly perceive the subtle substance of our auras betraying every thought, feeling, intention and detail of character we may attempt to hide.

What of the death God forebode upon one who even dared touch the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? God turns out to be the trickiest of participants in this ruse, allowing blame to be passed to the serpent. He curses the serpent above all beasts, condemning it to eat dust all the rest of its life. The reference to dust connects the serpent with earth.

Nachash is the name for the constellation Dracco, the dragon or serpent in the northern sky. The north is attributed to Peh,⁹ tarot key 16 and Mars. The Tower represents a stage of realization called the "Lightening Flash" in which the alchemist's false world formed from the illusion of separateness is obliterated by a sudden flash of direct cognition. This represents a dark period, or "death" for the alchemist. All that was identified with by the personality is now "as dust" in the light of a new, spiritual vista. Stretching to infinity before one is a superior reality based upon the law of unity. But this new territory is yet unfamiliar and therefore wears a shroud of thick darkness.

Dark, indeed do the Mysteries portray the north. Uriel, the archangel of the north and of the element earth, appears as the devil in key 15 attributed to Ayin. The Devil trump's foreboding exterior hides in plain sight some very important alchemical secrets. Astrologically, Capricorn, the sign of the winter solstice and darkest time of the year is linked to Ayin. It is an earth sign and key 15 represents that element in tarot. The first lesson of the Devil imagery is: earthly appearances are deceiving. This invites us to look below the surface of things to their cause.

Further analysis of key 15 leads to realizations about the occult nature of alchemical earth. Mars is exalted in Capricorn. The Devil's eyes are red, the color of Mars, to express that behind the mask of dark appearances lies an inner radiance. This is the alchemist's fire, depicted by the Tower key. An interesting symbol worth contemplating has been placed beneath the navel of the Devil. In spiritual alchemy, this is the area of the body where the center for physical energy, associated with Mars, is located. The figure has bat wings to indicate a hidden property of the atmosphere. It is part male and part female. Alchemical texts devote a great deal of attention to the Hermaphrodite.¹⁰ A number of illustrations depict a figure displaying attributes reminding us of key 15.



Here again, we find wings on a half male half female figure, who is a crowned regent. Two interesting trees in this illustration closely resemble those in key 6. The figure stands upon two rocks, thus representing a spiritual power supported by two bodies. The trees bear fruits i.e., physical manifestations of this force.

An interesting detail not depicted in either key 15 or 6 is the two-headed serpent biting the root of each tree thus completing a circuit between the two stones. The same idea is expressed in the Lovers, as the roots entwining the ground uniting the trees. This dragon of putrefaction, twisting and winding like the green serpent, is the same force depicted in tarot by key 8. Strength acts as the immediate agency producing the dark state of spiritual attainment mentioned in connection with the Devil key earlier.¹¹

In our illustration, we see the serpent force, acting as a catalyst to bring together two bodies and initiate a process known to alchemists as the white work. What starts out appearing black, becomes whitened gradually or "made to ascend by the degrees of Fire."¹² The lightning bolt in key 16 depicts the essential nature of the alchemist's Fire. So do the coils of the green serpent. In Strength, it's expressed by the erect, undulating, tale of the Red Lion. All these images represent the vibratory, wavy nature of electromagnetism. This is the force, behind the appearances in key 15, which manifests all physical phenomena. As expressed in our diagram, it is that which is at the very root of all form.

Taken together, the nuances of meaning of Kali¹³ Nachoshet express attributes of the Nephesh, a Qabalistic term describing the vital soul. It is our personal vessel, in which we prepare the serpent force, to complete a new kind of body.

Notes:

¹ Modern physicists using a particle accelerator, can combine copper, which has 29 protons in its nucleus, and tin with an atomic number of 50, to make gold having 79 protons.

² Artephius: "Our Brass or Latten then is made to ascend by the degrees of Fire, but of its own accord, freely, and without violence. But when it ascends on high, it is born in the Air or Spirit, and is changed into spirit; and becomes Life with Life. And by such an operation it is that the Body

is made of a subtle nature, and the Spirit is incorporated with the Body, and made one with it; and by such a sublimation, conjunction, and raising up, the whole, Body and Spirit, are made white."

³ Latten: "An alloy formerly made of or made to resemble brass, hammered thin and used in the manufacture of church vessels."

⁴ Chronicles I: "David brought very much brass - with it Solomon made the brazen sea, and the pillars, and the vessels of brass." (1 Ch. 8:8)

⁵ נחש [NChSh]: To shine. Originally Chaldean for copper or brass. Referring to its quality of appearance when polished. The ancients shined the surfaces of beaten copper and brass for use as mirrors.

⁶ Genesis: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath



God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye

shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:1-5) The serpent truthfully predicted the outcome. Immediately after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit "the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." (Gen. 3:7)

⁷ ערום [ORVM]: The word translated subtle, cunning, crafty (Gen 1:1), is derived from the same root as that of עירם [OIRM], naked (Gen 1:5). ערם [ORM] aram basically means to uncover, i.e. discover. Its number is 310, the same as יש [ISh], essence or being. The number for OIRM is 316 and ירוק [IRVQ], green has the very same.

⁸ Tarot is a pictorial key to the mysteries veiled by biblical allegory. In the oral tradition of the Qabalists, The bible, is a document about initiation. The tarot is a concise, pictorial key to this inner meaning.

⁹ The Sephir Yetzerah, or Book of Formation, associates the Hebrew letter Peh to the direction north. The cube of space, or flaming cube of the Chaldeans, is a visual representation of these spatial attributes.

¹⁰ Hermaphrodite: An androgynous, i.e. half-male-half-female figure discussed and illustrated in alchemy. Another name alchemists give this type of figure is "Rebus", Latin for "two-thing", being one in its nature and two in its appearance.

¹¹ When the tarot is arranged in a tableau of three rows of seven starting with key 1, Strength immediately precedes the Devil, which in turn completes a vertical column representing the first of seven stages of the Great Work.

¹² "made to ascend by the degrees of Fire" – See Artephius.¹

¹³ כלי [KLI] basically means whatever is made, completed or prepared.

It comes from the Hebrew root בלה [KLH] to complete. In the bible כלי is used to mean vessels, jewels, implements, utensils, tools, musical instruments, weapons, armor and clothing. These are all words, which describe the nature of the subtle organs of perception known in the East as chakras.

