

Spiritual Alchemy



Alchemical Brass – Part 2

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The location of the נפש nephesh on the Tree of Life¹ in Qabalah is the animal triad formed by Hod, Netzach and Yesod. It includes the faculties of instinct, motive power and intellectual knowledge to negotiate and survive in one's environment. The base of this triangle is the Foundation, היסוד ha-Yesod, linked to the Moon. This ninth sephirah is the seat of the nephesh.

The nephesh represents the distinct formative unit, the Vase of Our Art, as you will, in which the form of the physical body is poured from an amalgam of the elements².

Spiritual Alchemists, refer to themselves as "Natural Philosophers". The Alchemists also say "Nature unaided fails." The discriminating observer of Nature realizes the existence of certain original laws which govern lower, more apparent physical properties measurable with

scientific instruments. Mankind's modern inventions are conceived by finding different arrangements for known natural laws. So too are the Alchemical Artificers able to rearrange Nature's Hidden elements to remake their own world.

By combining keen observation of physical nature, and knowledge of occult doctrine, the Philosopher is able to link effects to certain ultimate causes. They observe that coming into life, the average human being functions on the level of an intelligent animal. The nephesh, our vital, animal soul, naturally functions on this basic biological level, organizing the body around survival and propagation of the species. The cells in our body, under the dominion of the normal processes of thinking, feeling and volition allow us to function naturally in the material world. The Moon as Nature rules all these functions.

Some modern interpreters believe copper the only true translation of nachoshet. This is symbolically useful. The word bronze, however, is also legitimate, especially when kali nachoshet means "weapons of war", made of hardened copper, alloyed with tin and iron. Alchemy would agree to emphasize the role copper, "our Venus", plays in the "White work". However, the idea of amalgamating the materials of lesser metals to make a precious one such as gold is a fundamental keynote of alchemy. So is the idea of alloying King Sol to Queen Luna to form the universal and triumphant androgen.

Yesod is also the center of the great lower triad stretching from Hod and Netzach down to Malkuth, the Kingdom³. This greater triangle, is sometimes described as the vegetable triad. It comprises the body and its cellular life, like a plant.

In one sense, the nephesh is a distinct body from the physical. It is the second one referred to earlier, which is brought together with the first in the process of the (White) work of the Moon. The King or Solar figure depicted both by the flaming tree and Adam in key 6, represents the first, or physical body.

The Alchemical Queen, or Lunar figure depicted in key 6 by the fruiting tree and by Eve is the etheric body. This is the electromagnetic envelop around the physical vehicle. It is the "second body, mentioned earlier, in reference to the White Work. In most human beings, the aura remains inert. Its relationship to the body is limited to the aforementioned basic survival functions.

The Alchemical Artist controls a third agent which causes a supernormal reaction and ultimately fusion between the physical body and its now more active etheric counterpart or double.

As previously stated, all this activity is initiated by the introduction of a specialized manifestation of the alchemist's fire into the body. The exact nature of this agent is embodied in the many descriptions the alchemists give for "Our Mercury"⁴.

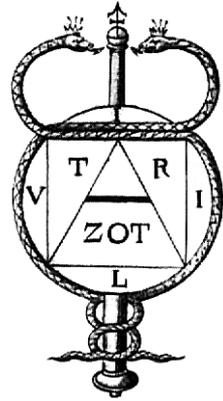


Astrologically, Mercury is neutral, having qualities attributed to both the Solar/Masculine force and the Lunar/Feminine. Mercury is also said to be extremely volatile. Alchemists often use the image of the winged, fire breathing serpent as another depiction of the philosophical Mercury. Thus again do we come back to the serpent in the bible, specifically to references of fiery serpents in Isiah and Numbers.

The word used for serpent here is שרפ "seraph" which is linked to the English "serp"-ent. In the bible it is used for a being with six wings accompanying God, for a flying serpent or dragon, and also for a common venomous serpent. The Israelites encountered the latter kind on their wanderings in the desert, after their flight from Egypt. It was at one of those moments when many of them were seriously doubting their mission. God sent "poisonous serpents" to bite them and many perished. The people implored Moses to intercede on their behalf. Moses prayed to God, who acquiesced by instructing him to make a "fiery serpent", and set it on a pole. God explained that whenever someone was bitten, they need only look upon this "fiery serpent" and they would live. It was never explained to Moses how exactly one makes a "fiery serpent". Moses was satisfied to cast a bronze one, which he mounted on a pole. This seemed to do the trick.

This "nachash nachoshet", or "Brasen Serpent" is in reality one which

should be very familiar to us, just as it was an instrument of healing in the bible, it has become a symbol for universal healing as the Caduceus.



Alas, the alchemists are very tricky in their numerous descriptions of Mercury. But particularly instructive are its attributes to fiery water, or watery fire, and also poisonous, universal solvent. When the true agent is applied, that natural barrier of accord between the two bodies being discussed dissolves. It is a poison to all false forms and notions not rooted in Spiritual Law. One can also translate יסוד yesod as "purity". The process of the White Work following the introduction of enough alchemical mercury, is one of purification and purgation.

Psychologically, the self-conscious and sub-conscious minds develop a different relationship. The Lovers shows this positive accord fostered by the quickened influx of super-conscious realization. The most important thing to purify in this process is our set of expectations regarding our own reality. Every thing about a person gradually gets retuned to the higher vibrations of spiritual substance. Erroneous patterns of belief in a separate existence are no longer compatible with the reality of Union with the Divine. They die out like the generations of Israelites who perished in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. The product of this process is a state called the "Promised Land", a vehicle that is reactive to Universal Creative Forces.

One word for polished brass is חשמל chashmal. It may have been formed from נחש, with the נ dropped, and a contraction of מללא, Chaldean for gold. Some scholars think that it stood originally for aurichalcum, a yellow copper ore from which brass is naturally mined. In the bible chashmal is found in Ezekiel⁵, and refers to something shining or bright. It is also translated to mean the color amber, i.e. golden, yellow-orange. Some scholars believe that this designates electrum, an amber colored metal that shines with remarkable brightness alloyed from gold and silver. In Modern Hebrew chashmal is the word for electricity. Now the color amber is attributed in tarot to the Chariot. In the right hand of charioteer is a wand and on top of it is an ornament of gold and silver fashioned together. Prominent in this picture are the pillars that

support the starry canopy of the chariot. As mentioned in the bible, King Solomon's temple sported two brazen pillars.

The brass breastplate of the Charioteer in key 7 extends from the neck seat of Venus, down to the lower abdominal region connected with Mars. The chest and abdomen contain all the vital organs. The gastrointestinal tract in particular stretches the entire vertical length of this region. נחשת nachoshet has a numerical value of 758 and another word having the same number is מַשְׁחִית mashchit, destroyer. It comes from the same root which corruption, putrefaction, and disintegration are derived. The biting dragon in our earlier diagram expresses this. Its coils, remind us of the intestines. Virgo rules this area of the body. It is an earth sign attributed to tarot key 9 the Hermit. The Hermit holds a lamp or מְנוֹרָה menorah which has the number 310, same as אש, fire. Menorah is derived from the Chaldean for fire, נור noor. The Hebrew אֶתְהַנּוֹר eth ha-nour is believed to be the origin of “athanor”, the word used by alchemists to describe their furnace. Taken literally it can mean "the essence of fire". These symbolic hints indicate the true nature of our alchemical furnace and how to fuel it. And regarding what to cook in it? The most important quality brass possessed as a symbol for the alchemists is that it is an amalgam of different metals, which combined have a different property than the individuals involved.

We arrive at the Marriage of the alchemical King and Queen so often depicted in alchemical texts. On their nuptial night, it is said they commingle in a bath. This Bath is also called Mary's Bath. The reference is to the phonetical and etymological Qabalah which the alchemists often exploit. Mary is related to “Mere”, Ocean., and refers not to a mythical Famous woman alchemist who was said to have invented it. Mary, mother of Jesus, is the same kind of symbol. The references are to the feminine, the oceanic and the womb. Truly Space and the fluidic ether it contains is the mother of all. The alchemists proclaim her "Lactus Virginis" or Virgins Milk is the true source of Our Mercury. The receptacle in which to pour it, they call their “Hermitic Vessel”. The alchemical process of libation is described as Queen Dianna in her bath. It is the ethereal vehicle which holds this very special "Water that won't wet the hands".

The alchemists understand that the true philosophical Mercury, the “Two-Thing” is both Spiritual in its nature, and is also a substance on a different level from the physical. They realize also that our

electromagnetic, envelope is a substantial body on that very same level. Thus our second body is an appropriate container for this "Water", just as our physical body is an appropriate container for food. As the level of this Fiery Water goes up, the spiritual "heat" increases. This gentle heat eventually amalgamates the aforementioned bodies. We are told by many texts that the right amount of heat is that of a hens egg. Haste is made slowly in alchemy. One can ruin the soup by doing too much too soon. The spagyric alchemists, i.e. those who make physical medicinal preparations based on alchemical principal, employ their Mary's (water) bath, much as we use a double boiler to apply gentle, constant heat. The meaning for the spiritual alchemist should now be clear. The initiate must be consistent in daily practices without overdoing it.

Notes:

1. In Qabalah, the Tree of Life is an arrangement of ten spheres representing the relationship between different primal, creative forces. Each "Sephirah" is ultimately, an aspect of the Unified Godhead, which enters into creation as a distinct unit. The Sephiroth interact upon each other, the product of which becomes in four successive stages, Manifestation. Thus do these ten spheres of consciousness represent the weave and warp of every living breathing thing on earth.
2. Note the many references to vessels cast from molten bronze in the passages in Kings regarding the building of King Solomon's Temple.
3. The sephirah Malkuth is attributed in Qabalah as the guph or body.
4. "Our Mercury" is another name the alchemists give the figure of the Androgyne or Rebus.
5. "And upon the apparition of the throne was the likeness of a man. And I saw Him looking as the colour of amber, with fire within and all around. From the appearance of His loins upward, and from the appearance of his loins downward, I saw Him looking like fire, with brightness round about. As the likeness of a rainbow so the brightness appeared all around. This apparition was the likeness of the glory of the LORD."

