

## **Albert Hofmann and the Quest for the Alchemical Philosopher's Stone**

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*Alchemy*, descended from shamanism, is the ancient art and science of elemental transformation. The historian of religion Mircea Eliade posited in his book *The Forge and the Crucible* (1962) that alchemy grew historically out of the work of shamanic miners, smiths and metallurgists. They were the masters of fire, who knew how to extract metals (like copper, tin, iron, gold, silver) from stone, blend them into alloys such as bronze, and make tools (like adz, hammer, plow), weapons (like spear, sword, dagger, shield) and ornaments (like necklace, bracelet, crown, ring). In the archaic and classical period the knowledge of metal-working, because of its obvious connection to power and wealth, was preserved in secrecy and handed down in craft-guilds from master to student. Such technical knowledge was regarded as *magical* by ordinary people, because it seemed to involve inexplicable mastery of natural forces. The crafts of masonry, which uses mineral stones in building, and medicine, which uses mineral and botanical extracts in healing (as well as metal tools in surgery), were parallel and associated secret societies. All three movements developed an esoteric or inner component, concerned with practices of psychic and spiritual self-transformation.

A popular misconception is that alchemy was solely and futilely concerned with the transmutation of base metals to gold. In actuality, it is clear from alchemical writings that the main focus of most alchemical practitioners was healing and what we would nowadays call psychotherapy: the *transmutation of the physical and psychic condition of the human being – starting with oneself*. The worldview of the archaic and classical eras was *holistic* – the physical, psychic, spiritual and cosmic dimensions of life were seen in their wholeness, not as separate fields. As such, alchemy can be considered a specialized extension of the shamanic traditions of healing and transformation dating from the Old Stone Age. Shamans in surviving indigenous societies also have specialized knowledge of plants and mineral substances, including crystals, and secret initiatory knowledge of the spiritual dimensions. They negotiate with the normally inaccessible spirits of nature and the ancestors on behalf of their clients.

Alchemists, like shamans, worked with *spirits*, in particular the spirits of the elements (air, fire, earth and water) and certain deities (Hephaestos for the Greeks, Vulcanus for the Romans) that were the guides and teachers of mining and blacksmithing. The great 16<sup>th</sup> century alchemical adept Paracelsus identified and named the spirits associated with the four elements: the air spirits were called *elves*, the water spirits *undines*, the earth spirits *gnomes*, and the fire spirits *salamanders*. In Germanic-Norse mythology, the spirits of stone, metal and fire were called the “black elves” (*Schwarzalben*) or dwarves. Their home world, called *Schwarzalfeim*, was underground, in the stones, rocks and mountains. Like the giants, who are the spirits of vast natural aggregates like mountain ranges, forests, rivers and storms, the dark elves were neither benevolent nor malevolent toward humans. They were said to have their own agenda, neutral in regard to human welfare and survival. But humans could communicate with them and learn from them, if one had the access codes, so to speak. One could say that those human beings who worked as miners and smiths, the makers of metal weapons, tools and ornaments, were in fact inspired and taught by these stone-spirits, these black elves.

INSERT IMAGE OF PARACELSUS ABOUT HERE

The myths of Odin/Wotan, the knowledge-seeking god of shamans and warriors, tell of him wandering the worlds asking questions – of gods, goddesses, elves, giants, humans and dwarves, and even the dead. One of the poems of the *Eddas* relates a dialogue between the thunder god Thor and a very knowledgeable dwarf called *Allwiss*, the “All-knowing One”, who is interested in marrying Thor’s daughter. Thor, wanting to test and discourage his daughter’s suitor, poses a series of more and more difficult linguistic puzzles, which the knowledgeable dwarf successfully answers, until he is overcome by the light of day. I find the mythic image of the morally neutral spirits of metal and stone suggestive, in view of the morally questionable nature of many of the technologies that modern science has loosed upon the world.

We can see in this ancient mythic conception an understanding of the principle that the knowledge of natural forces and tools is morally neutral: it can be used for health and creativity, in the service of the divine and of life; but when used for personal

aggrandizement, domination and enrichment at the expense of others, it becomes sorcery, black magic, the “dark side”. Shamans, alchemists, doctors, wizards or witches, or modern scientists, who use their knowledge and power, and knowledge of the spirits of nature, to heal and serve others are contributing to the well-being of the community and society. Those who use their knowledge and power for the accumulation of wealth and personal power over others, serve only the individual or a select group – not the whole.

Paleolithic shamanism developed knowledge and methods of healing transformation, by accessing the hidden spiritual forces behind or within the phenomena of the world of nature around them. In the Egyptian and Greco-Roman civilizations alchemy developed as the extension and continuation of this Paleolithic practice and science – as empirically tested *technologies of physico-psychic-spiritual transformation*. In India, the transformative practices of shamans and alchemists developed into the psycho-spiritual practices of *Yoga*. Mircea Eliade, in his book *Yoga – Immortality and Freedom* (1969) showed that yoga was crucially concerned with practices that liberate consciousness from the thrall of the material sense world – this was called the path of *mukti* – liberation. Alchemical texts do exist in the Indian yogic healing tradition, known as Ayurveda, and are often concerned with the use of psychoactive and medicinal plant, fungal or mineral substances. A central concept of alchemical tantric yoga was *rasa*, -- which means something like “essence”, “tincture”, “feeling”, and “taste”. This strand of the yogic tradition was called *rasayana*, “the way of cultivating essence”.

Alchemy is also known in Chinese Taoism, where it is an integral aspect of the Taoist preoccupations with longevity (called “immortality”) and the yogic practices of recycling sexual energies for regeneration. It appears that in the Indian and Chinese traditions, the physical, psychic and spiritual aspects of the transformational work remained more or less connected, although sub-schools arose which focused on one or another aspect (e.g. *hatha yoga* on the physical, *bhakti yoga* on the emotional). In the West, the alchemical practices of human elemental transformation originated in Egypt, spread to the Hellenistic and Arabic lands during the classical era, and flourished well into medieval times in Christian Europe.

The word “alchemy”, which is the root word of “chemistry”, comes from the Arabic *al-kimiya* – “the science of the black earth land”. *Kam*, or *Kem*, “Black Earth”, was the ancient Egyptian name for their land, referring to the very fertile black earth along the Nile after the seasonal floods. It was the land of the Black Goddess (Nut, Isis, or Hathor), who transmuted into the Black Madonna in Christian times. The name points to the Egyptian origin of alchemy. At its greatest flowering, the ancient Egyptian civilization, which may indeed have been founded by an even earlier Atlantean or even extra-terrestrial civilization, embodied a completely integrated scientific, spiritual and artistic worldview, a *sacred science*, to use the term of renowned Egyptologist Schwaller de Lubicz.

In the Hellenistic period, the god *Hermes*, who was *Thoth* or *Djehuti* to the Egyptians, and *Mercurius* to the Romans, emerged as the main deity or spirit guide of the alchemical work of transformation. Thoth was the scientist, scribe and record keeper among the gods. Hermes/Mercury was the divine messenger, carrying knowledge between the divine and human worlds – and thus the *practice of divination*. Mercury the metal, also called *quicksilver*, because of its highly mobile, fluid characteristics, became symbolically associated with the mind or awareness. Like quicksilver, the mind can slip and slide to strange elusive places, but it can also shine with sparkling brilliance. In addition to Hermes the god, there was also a legendary, very advanced human spiritual teacher, called *Hermes Trismegistos* (“Three-fold Great Hermes”). The appellation “Three-fold Great”, refers perhaps to the three phases of manifestation of this divine being – as youth, as man and as old man, analogous to the mythic image of the Triple Goddess as maiden, mother and crone.

INSERT IMAGE OF THREE-FOLD HERMES ABOUT HERE

This Hermes the Teacher-Adept initiated a whole school of secret knowledge of self-transformation practices, that formed the core of European alchemy, which became known as the *Hermetic tradition*. Whereas one strand of this knowledge stream concerned itself with the transformation of physical matter, the making of tools, medicines and instruments, the esoteric, mystical core of it were the practices of psychospiritual self-transformation. The most important of the material tools, including

plant or fungal or mineral tinctures, as well as metallic instruments, were those that contributed to the practices of consciousness transformation. The secrecy in this tradition was so profound that the term “hermetically sealed” is still a symbolic expression of absolute secrecy. The teachings of the school were not secret arbitrarily or for reasons of power and control, as is sometimes assumed. Rather, they were secret, for the same reason that esoteric yogic and shamanic practices are kept secret, -- because misuse of the knowledge by those motivated by greed or power could have harmful consequences. Later, during the European Middle Ages, because of the persecutory dominance of the Catholic Church, such practices, like the practices of shamanic witchcraft, were shrouded in secrecy because of the very real danger of the Inquisition. Texts were written and illustrated, but in a symbolic code, known only to initiated students, and copied and passed on. The keys to the code were largely lost in the course of time, and the texts became increasingly garbled and incomprehensible.

Under the pressure of the persecutory ideological zeal of the Catholic Church over several centuries, the Hermetic tradition in Europe basically split into two strands during the time of the beginnings of the materialist science paradigm (16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> centuries): one strand became what we call “chemistry” in modern times -- the precise quantitative, experimental investigations into transformational processes at the molecular level, but with no consideration given to the possible relationship of the molecular processes to the world of Spirit and higher states of consciousness and knowledge. This other part of the tradition split off and went underground, became “occult” (“hidden”), as we say. A similar schism happened to the ancient holistic science of astrology, with one strand splitting off as scientific astronomy, and the other being relegated to the cultural underground as “superstition”. It’s interesting to recall that two of the founding giants of the scientific worldview – Isaac Newton and Johannes Kepler – were themselves deep students of these secret esoteric sciences. Newton spent 17 years investigating alchemical texts and performing alchemical experiments in his laboratory, before going on to formulate the laws of motion for which he became famous. Kepler wrote major contributions to astrological thought, did occasional horoscopes for rulers and princes, and pursued his research into the orbital paths of the planets in the belief that he was

uncovering the basic “harmonies of the cosmos” (which became the title of his major work).

INSERT IMAGE OF C.G. JUNG ABOUT HERE

It remained to C.G. Jung and his followers, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to recover the lost language of alchemy and re-interpret it as referring to psychospiritual transformation using symbolic and imaginal processes. Four of the twenty or so volumes of Jung’s *Collected Works*, are essentially alchemical texts: *Psychology and Alchemy*, *Alchemical Studies*, *Aion* and *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. In such works Jung interprets the *opus* or work of alchemy as being the individuation process – moving toward wholeness. the alchemical *vessel*, called *athanor*, in which these transformative processes are taking place, is the psyche. From my studies of Alchemical Yoga, the working with light-fire energies, I would add only that the alchemical vessel should be understood to refer *also to the physical body and subtle energy-field*, and not merely the mental-emotional psyche, -- in other words, the entire set of interrelated energy-systems constituting the human being. The human energy-systems, which can also be thought of as “personality systems”, are the multi-layered vessel, container, body, or sheath (*koshas* in Yoga) for the Immortal Soul, Spirit, or Essence.

Western esoteric teachings concur in asserting that there are four intermediate or personality levels of consciousness, or four bodies of differing density or vibratory frequency. The physical body (called “sheath made of food” in the Yoga tradition) is the heaviest or densest; and in order of decreasing density or increasing vibratory rate, the others are – the perceptual (or etheric), the emotional (or astral or psychic), and the mental (or noetic). Above the mental (“above” referring to vibratory rate, not space) are the three or four transpersonal levels of Soul and Spirit. Rudolf Steiner’s formulation, consistent with this, is to say there are three *personal levels of soul*: soul of understanding, soul of feeling and soul of perception. In Jung’s psychology these teachings are transformed into his theory of *four functions*: thinking, feeling, intuition and sensation, which may be differently developed in individuals of different type.

Although the names may vary somewhat in various esoteric texts, on the whole there is a recognition that these four levels of the human being are related symbolically, and by harmonic resonance to the four *elements as states of matter*. The element *AIR* refers to matter in its gaseous state, to breath and breathing, and corresponds to the mental body and Jung's thinking function. The element *WATER* refers to liquids of all kinds, including fluids in the body (water, blood, lymph, hormones), and corresponds to the emotional body and the feeling function. The element *FIRE* refers to energy and radiation of all kinds, including electro-magnetic energy fields of the human nervous systems, and corresponds to the perceptual body and intuitive function. The element *EARTH* refers to material substance of all kinds, including the flesh and bones physical body, and corresponds to the sensation function, in Jung's terminology.

INSERT ALCHEMICAL IMAGE OF THE FOUR ELEMENTS HERE

A momentary reflection will enable one to see that the gaseous, fluid, electro-magnetic and solid elements making up the human body, and the personality systems related to it by symbolic resonance, are always in different phases of transformation one into the other. Thoughts trigger feelings, perceptions instigate thoughts and behavior, and so on, just as solids dissolve into liquids (the alchemical *solutio*), and liquids congeal into solid matter (alchemical *coagulatio*). Consciously participating in these elemental transformations with intention toward a healthier, more harmonious and more integrated functioning is the alchemical spiritual practice, or *opus*. One traditional definition of the alchemical *opus* was that it involved *the marriage of the subtle and the dense*: the integration of the subtle psychic and spiritual energies with the dense material body. Also the alchemical motto *solve et coagula* ("dissolve and coagulate"), can be understood in these terms: we should dissolve the solidified defensive structures (physical, perceptual, emotional, mental) so Spirit can be released; and solidify the energy flows of the high-frequency subtle dimensions into the material body, a process also referred to as earthing or embodiment.

In tracing the historical roots of alchemy to shamanic knowledge-seeking traditions, a question that arises is what happened to the understanding and practice of altered states of consciousness – the "shamanic journey" to acquire healing knowledge

and power, which is the central technical process in shamanism. We must remember that shamanic practices arose in hunter-gatherer societies, particularly among hunters in intimate contact with animals – both those hunted for food, and those that are hunters or raptors themselves, as allies. Thus the metaphor of the journey -- riding on an animal or transformed into one -- is a natural choice to describe the process of seeking knowledge for healing or guidance (known as divination) by going into an intentional lucid trance state. Such shamanic journey states were typically induced by rhythmic drumming, as in Siberian and other Northern Hemisphere indigenous societies, or by the ingestion of psychoactive plant extracts, usually accompanied by rhythmic chanting, as in the ceremonies involving peyote, or the psilocybe mushroom, or ayahuasca.

The first alchemists, by contrast, were craftsmen (they called themselves *artists*) in the fields of mining and blacksmithing, living in villages or towns. They were also health practitioners using medicinal minerals herbs, and fungi. So their preferred term for the work of self-transformation, was in fact *opus* - “the work” or the *art*. Their interest was in long-lasting transformations of the totality of the human being. The various operations of the alchemical work metaphors for the intentional processes of self-transformation, at the mental, emotional, perceptual and physical levels. For example, the operation called *solutio* or “dissolving,” which was represented in alchemical literature by the image of a man sitting in a hot tub, is a metaphor for the process of dissolving the physico-psychic armoring and defensive structures that block and distort the flow of life energy. The purification of substances using fire or heat (called *purificatio*) is metaphor for the refinement of thought and perception using the purification methods of yogic inner fire. The operation of *separatio* was the analytical process of separating complex patterns into constituent elements. C. G. Jung used to say that we need to practice the “setting apart” of the contents of the unconscious (*auseinandersetzen*). The operation of *coniunctio*, the conjunction of Sun and Moon, or King and Queen, to which Jung devoted his most massive tome, is a metaphor for the integration of masculine and feminine energies, or animus and anima, within the psyche. The Jungian psychotherapist Edward Edinger, in his book *Anatomy of the Psyche* (1985) offers insightful psychological interpretations and symbolic elaborations of these alchemical operations and others,

including *calcinatio*, *coagulatio*, *mortificatio*, *purificatio*, *solutio*, *sublimatio*, *separatio*, and *coniunctio*.

INSERT ALCHEMICAL IMAGES OF SOLUTIO, CONIUNCTIO,  
SEPARATIO

It is the great merit of Jung's work to have rehabilitated the alchemical wisdom tradition from its status as a discredited underground superstition, and to reformulate it as the symbolic language of choice for analytical depth psychology. Jung's writings aimed at establishing the reality of psychological phenomena and processes, against the exclusionary truth claims of materialist and behaviorist psychology in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His psychology also made room for the acceptance and consideration of religious imagery, both Western and Eastern, including Yoga, Buddhism and Chinese Taoism. It remained for another Swiss scientist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Albert Hofmann (a Baseler, whereas Jung was a Züricher), to reconnect psychology with the material element of the holistic alchemical tradition. With the discovery of psychoactive or psychedelic ("mind-manifesting") drugs (or perhaps we should say re-discovery, since the evidence indicates they were known in ancient times) the Western healing and spiritual knowledge tradition has come full circle from its detour through theocratic dogma and reductionistic science. The aim and practice of the Hermetic alchemical tradition is, as it ever was, the complete transformation of the individual, the physical, perceptual, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects, toward an integrated wholeness. Jung called this process *individuation* – becoming an undivided whole Self. In the symbolic language of the medieval alchemists, this process was called the quest for the philosophers' stone, the *lapis philosophorum*.

To understand the relevance of psychedelic substances to the alchemical work of holistic self-transformation, we need only remind ourselves of the research studies that have demonstrated the facilitative action of psychedelics on (a) psychotherapy of neurotic, psychosomatic and addictive pathologies; (b) creative problem-solving and imagination; and (c) growth in spiritual awareness; and (d) mystic and religious visions. The concept of psycholytic therapy, like psychoanalysis, is based on the alchemical operations of *separatio* and *solutio*; the process, whether enhanced with psychoactive

substances or not, involves the setting apart of complexes into their constituent elements (thoughts, feelings, sensations, etc), and the dissolving of acquired defensive structures. Psychedelics are also called “consciousness expanding” or “awareness amplifying” – the ordinarily subtle perceptions of internal states and energetic phenomena of external phenomena, like auras or energy fields, can be enormously heightened and vivified, bringing clarity and insight. Psychedelic experiences bring about an expansion of one’s sense of identity beyond the usual boundaries of our body-self to an incontrovertible knowledge of one’s identity as a spiritual being. Here comes the profound relevance of psychedelic experience to a recognition of life after death, the nature of the soul, and the mysteries of incarnation. Awareness may also expand outward into a greatly enhanced sense of our interconnectedness with all life forms in the great ecological web of life, and into the greater cosmos beyond our usual Earth-centered perspective. We can come to the realization that we are multi-dimensional cosmic Beings of Light.

The connection of psychedelic substances to the shamanic and yogic traditions of consciousness transformation is also evident. Albert Hofmann’s own work in identifying the psychoactive principle of the visionary mushroom, and his collaboration with R. Gordon Wasson and the Mazatec shamaness Maria Sabina, made a crucial re-connection to almost forgotten shamanic traditions of the use of material biological substances in the quest for healing and knowledge. His work on the identification of the elusive secret of the Eleusinian mystery religion re-established a link to the deepest spiritual wisdom tradition of the ancient, classical world. The testimony of numerous practitioners of meditation and yoga has demonstrated without a doubt that the psychophysiological practices of yoga, especially tantric yoga, and the essence-path of *rasayana*. can be enormously facilitated and strengthened with the judicious and careful use of psychedelic substances.

I want to point out here that the drugs themselves do not automatically produce healing, therapeutic or mystical effects – it’s not a question of pharmacology. Everything depends on set and setting, on intention. Awareness tools, like any tools, can be misused and abused. But given a spiritual orientation and intention they can be used to amplify,

catalyze and facilitate healing, psychotherapeutic, creative and meditative processes in shamanic, yogic and alchemical practice, as well as in complementary medicine and therapy.

*So what then is or was the philosophers' stone and how does it relate to psychedelic visionary mystical experience?*

**First, stone is matter from the mineral realm of nature, the primordial substrate** or ground of all life and therefore consciousness. We are connected with the mineral realm at the molecular level since certain of the elements in our body and in our food are mineral elements. The molecular level of reality and consciousness is more basic than the level of cellular life. One could say that if awareness is grounded at the molecular level, it is truly grounded. Perhaps this is the meaning of the expression “being stoned” that is popularly used to describe the psychedelic state. Furthermore, psychedelic drugs and endogenous neurotransmitters that induce visions and dreams in the brain, such as DMT, may take the form of purified and crystallized mineral or plant extracts.

**Second, the *lapis* is also described as being fluid, like water, or an essence or tincture**, or a healing panacea, or a combination of stone and water. One alchemical text of the 17<sup>th</sup> century is titled *The Sophic Hydrolith*. Symbolically, this suggests the psychedelic, visionary state of consciousness, while grounded fully in material reality, is also fluid, non-attached and flowing, like the ancient Chinese way of *Tao*, the watercourse way.

**Third, the stone is said to be everywhere around one in external reality.**

“Our stone is found in all mountains, all trees, all herbs, and animals, and with all human beings. It wears many different colors, contains the four elements, and has been designated a microcosm”, says the 16<sup>th</sup> century text *Glory of the World*. “This stone is under you, and near you, and above you, and around you,” states another text. This is reminiscent of the saying of Jesus from the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*: “The Kingdom of

Heaven is spread out upon the Earth, and men do not see it...The Kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you.”

**Fourth, and yet, - not obvious and overt** “Our substance is openly displayed before the eyes of all, and yet it is not known” , according to a text called *The New Chemical Light*. “Learned doctors.. have it before their eyes every day, but they do not understand it, because they never attend to it.” (*The Glory of the World*). This perhaps points to the fluid elusiveness and interiority of this water-stone consciousness – it is entirely a function of the attitude and perspective we take on things – and not something you can point out to someone else. “Those who have eyes to see will see”.

**Fifth, the stone is within.** “This thing is extracted from you, you are its ore; ...and when you have experienced this, the love and desire for it will be increased in you. “(Morienus) The experience is an inner experience, arising out of the core of our being, whether it is catalyzed by an external crystalline substance or coming to us spontaneously. It is a state of wisdom consciousness, that can only be known through direct personal experience. “We cannot be resolved of any doubt except by experiment, and there is no better way to make it than on ourselves” (Gerhard Dorn). My teacher Russell Schofield told me once: “The philosopher’s stone is not a magical object, it is the magnificent condition resulting from reaching objectivity”. The stone is the ability to be objective about fact, to perceive and know the “hard fact” of a given situation as it actually is, without illusions and distortions. To know objectively is to know with the certainty that one knows. Just as in mining, the precious stone needs to be separated from the surrounding ore that covers and conceals it, so the precious essence of truth has to be separated from the superimposed illusions and distortions.

**Sixth, the stone is the offspring of the inner union or *coniunctio* of Sun and Moon.**

“This child of the two parents, of the elements and heaven, has in itself such a nature that the potentiality and the actuality of both parents can be found in it.”(Gerhard Dorn) “The Sun is its Father, the Moon its Mother, the Wind bears it in its womb, and it is nursed by the Earth.” (Hermes Trismegistos). *Sun and Moon* or *King and Queen* are

consistent alchemical symbolic images for the basic yang-yin, dynamic-receptive, electric-magnetic polarity of the human personality and body as energy systems. Their integration in the alchemical transformation work is metaphorically portrayed as the inner marriage, or royal marriage. In Jungian terms this would be called the integration of the masculine animus and feminine anima component of the psyche. The metaphoric portrayal of this central interior process and practice as a sexual conjoining of male and female, is also found in the iconography of the Hindu and Buddhist *Tantras* and in Chinese Taoism. The Wisdom Stone is said to be the offspring or result of this inner union, i.e. the result of extended practice eliminating the obstructions to this kind of interior conjunction. The alchemical work was also often described as the *marriage of fire and water*. FIRE and AIR are considered masculine, because their energies rise upward and disperse outward; WATER and EARTH are considered feminine, because their energies sink downward and gather inward.

**Seventh, the stone partakes of all four elements.** “It is called perfect because it has in itself the nature of mineral, vegetable and animal. For the stone is triple and one, having four natures.” (Hortulanus). “It illumines all bodies, since it is the light of the light, and their tincture”. (Geber). “When the pure and essential elements are joined together in loving equilibrium, as they are in our Stone, they are inseparable and immortal, like the human body in Paradise” states a text called *The New Chemical Light*. This means that the state or condition of enlightened wisdom consciousness involves the integrated functioning of all four levels of consciousness or functions – the mental-thinking, emotional-feeling, perceptual-intuitive, and physical-sensate – as well as Soul and Spirit. The alchemists would also say that this integrated functioning of all four elemental processes can produce a fifth essence (*quintessentia*). Perhaps, this more subtle and spiritual essence corresponds to what C.G. Jung spoke of as the *transcendent function*. From the legendary *Emerald Tablet*, a text attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, we learn that this transformative essence-stone is the offspring of the marriage of FIRE and WATER (“The Sun is its Father, the Moon is its Mother”). It is conceived and carried first in elemental AIR, the mind (“The wind has carried it in its womb”). It is then nourished and grounded in the physical earth-body (“It is nursed by the EARTH”).

**Finally, the Philosophers' Stone is something supremely precious and extraordinary.** The text called *The Sophic Hydrolith* calls it “The most ancient, secret, natural, incomprehensible, heavenly, blessed, beatified, and triune, universal Stone of the Sages”. Similar effusive praises of this rare and precious state are scattered throughout the alchemical literature of the European Middle Ages. I think it would not be an exaggeration to say that virtually everyone who has ever experienced the full-blown visionary opening produced by LSD or other psychedelics under favorable circumstances, would echo such statements. For myself, I would say that my first psychedelic experience, which was with psilocybin, in 1961, was one of the two most profound turning points in my life – after which everything in my life changed. Hardly a month goes by even now, (including when I was writing this text) when I do not hear a similar sentiment expressed to me by someone, in regard to their first, and sometimes only, psychedelic experience.

I would like to conclude by relating these descriptions of the miraculous properties of the Stone of the Sages, to Albert Hofmann's story of his discovery of LSD. The story is well known, and I will only mention briefly certain strange aspects, which seem to indicate some kind of divinely inspired event, a *synchronicity*, in Jung's terms. There is the highly significant timing of this discovery – in 1943, at the height of WWII, within months of Enrico Fermi's first controlled nuclear chain reaction, which led directly to the building of the atomic bomb; as if it was to be a kind of psychospiritual antidote to this death weapon. There is the extreme improbability of a Swiss pharmaceutical laboratory chemist, having such sloppy lab techniques as to accidentally absorb a chemical through his skin! What intrigued me the most about his story, was how Albert knew that the experience he was having was triggered by a drug – leading him to go back to the lab and test it out.

Although the profound consciousness-altering effects of mescaline, derived from the peyote cactus, were known, and Kurt Beringer had published studies of mescaline at the University of Heidelberg in the 1920s, Hofmann did not know this work at the time, he has told me. His area of expertise was the pharmaceutical chemistry of ergot alkaloids.

In response to my question of how he knew it was a substance he had ingested, he related the story of his childhood experience of the oneness and all-inclusiveness of the natural world. He has described this visionary experience in his writings and talks:

“As I was walking through the fresh green woods, suffused with morning sunlight and filled with the song of birds, all at once everything appeared in an extraordinarily clear light. Had I previously not really looked, and was I now suddenly seeing these springtime woods as they really were? They were glowing with a light that touched my heart with its beauty and seemed to draw me into its splendor. An indescribable feeling of blessed belongingness and connectedness was flowing through me.”

We can notice here the same language and imagery that the alchemists used when describing their experience of the stone-wisdom. As a child, he thought he would never be able to express or relate this experience through words or painting or music, and so instead decided to devote his life to the scientific understanding of the material world -- to become a chemist. He realized, that day in April 1943, that the perception of the all-inclusive wholeness and belongingness with Nature he was having, must have been triggered in him by a natural material substance. That and subsequent experiences with LSD and psilocybin, led him to conclude that certain psychoactive plant substances could, under certain conditions, evoke experiences similar to this kind of spontaneous natural mystical vision. Hofmann himself has said that the deepest significance of the LSD experience goes beyond its uses as a powerful aid to psychiatry – for it points the way to a reconciliation between the scientific and the mystical worldview.

I will mention one last interesting synchronicity between Hofmann’s work and the teachings of the alchemical philosophers. The alchemists said, as mentioned above, that the stone-wisdom consciousness, was the offspring of the inner conjunction of Sun and Moon, which I translate as the integration of the dynamic-receptive polarity of the human energy systems. In Hofmann’s philosophical writings he has formulated a theory that he calls the transmitter-receiver model of reality. I quote from his lovely little gem of a book, *Insight and Outlook*.

“What we call reality comes into being through an interaction between outer and inner space... It (reality) is the product of a transmitter in external space and a receiver in inner

space.” ... What we call reality is the product of a reciprocal interaction between material and energetic signals being emitted from the external world and the conscious living self in the inner world of the human being.”

One could regard this as a philosophical statement or expression of the inner knowing of the *coniunctio*, growing out of his psychedelic experiences.

In conclusion -- I am *not* saying that LSD or any other psychoactive molecule *is* the legendary Stone of the Philosophers. I *am* saying that through the discovery of psychedelic substances, and in particular LSD (with its extreme potency), and with his immediate recognition of its spiritual significance, Albert Hofmann re-connected the broken thread of the West's alchemical wisdom tradition. In making his contributions to published scientific chemistry and medicine, at the time and the place in which he found himself, he provided all present and future seekers a wonderful aid in their quest for that most precious Wisdom Water-Stone, and a key to liberating self-knowledge. For that, I bow to Albert Hofmann, from the depths of my soul, with the most profound gratitude.