

All in life that glitters not gold, alchemists say

■ Seminar on kitchen alchemy to demonstrate how to distill the divine from the ordinary.

By **MARK E. JONES**

Times Leader Staff Writer

WILKES-BARRE — Talk about a "golden" opportunity.

For \$50, an Illinois man will teach you how to turn a household kitchen into a laboratory for do-it-yourself alchemy.

Oh, sure, Russell House is braced for his 6½-hour seminar on Saturday to draw "a certain amount of reasonable skepticism."

But, no, this instructor with the Wheaton-based Philosophers of Nature says, today's alchemy has nothing to do with the commonly held perception of Medieval wizards morphing iron into gold. "If we were doing that," he dead-



pans, "we'd be too busy to give seminars."

Rather, House tutors neophytes in how to extract oils from non-

toxic plants — lavender, caraway and lemon balm, for example — and use the substances to make an emotion-and-spirit-lifting elixir.

"Our interest is not really to cure the body, but to fix imbalances in the being itself," says House, 43. "You could say we're looking for medicines to help the soul."

The Alchemy Workshop will be from 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday at the Elks Club, 25 W. South St., Wilkes-Barre. Registration begins at 9. The workshop costs \$50 per person, or \$75 per couple.

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Alchemy

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Each participant will be taught kitchen-level chemistry, where electric frying pans, babyfood jars and Corningware serve as less-expensive substitutes for beakers and Bunsen burners.

Why bother with a messy, mortar and pestle when you already own a coffee grinder? These aren't the Dark Ages, after all.

Throughout history, alchemy has been much-maligned and largely misunderstood, says co-organizer Mark Stavish, 32, of Wilkes-Barre. It has more to do with philosophy, meditation and spiritual development than heavy-metal mutations, he says. And its practitioners seek to answer the Big questions: Who are we? Why are we here? And where are we going?

According to an alchemist, each plant, animal and mineral has its own life force. By concentrating on that life force while changing it with chemistry, the alchemist can change too.

"That's the difference (between an alchemist and chemist)," says Stavish. "(The alchemist) works with a different attitude, a broader realization of 'What is life?' And that is an ever-expanding spiral of knowledge up to that of God's, whatever that might be. Only God knows."

A tad perplexing, huh?

Workshop participants should have an open mind and be prepared to learn a new lexicon. Flyers promoting the workshop say that topics will include "Using the Planetary Genii in Alchemical practice" and "How the Qabalistic model is an effective map of human evolution."

In layperson's terms, Stavish says, "We're going to show (participants) how the chemical process relates to the internal process of meditation."

By drinking a few drops of elixir, then meditating for 15 to 20 minutes, Stavish says he has achieved "glimpses." He defines a "glimpse" as "an incredible clarity, or lucidity, about what is happening in your life ... often accompanied by a great sense of love."

Some people might bristle at alchemists' claims. Yet The Philosophers of Nature, whose alchemy instructors are reimbursed for travel expenses but not paid seminar fees, have developed a World Wide Web site ([http://www.mcs.net/\(tilde\)alchemy/index.html](http://www.mcs.net/(tilde)alchemy/index.html)) at which they adopt a conciliatory tone.

"Our members include adherents of Christianity, Judaism, various Eastern and Earth religions, and more," say The Philosophers.

Among the frequently asked questions that The Philosophers get from Web surfers: Are you a fraternal order? Are you a religion? Are you a cult? And do you work with dangerous materials?

The answer to all: NO. Ultimately, each alchemist is simply searching for "the philosopher's stone."

"To us," Stavish says, "that represents personal perfection."

An impossible goal, no doubt.

"But in just working toward that perfection," he says, "we increase within ourselves a sense of harmony toward the universe we live in. ... And what can be better than that?"