

# Practical Plant Alchemy

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Alchemy, or "Divine Chemistry", has for centuries fascinated practitioners and armchair enthusiasts alike. The possibilities of experiencing an actual transmutation of a base metal into gold, achieving long and healthy life, or immortality, are the legendary promises that await the successful alchemists in their search for the Philosopher's Stone.

## The Gross from the Subtle

Despite numerous misconceptions about alchemists and their practices, both in ancient and modern times, the true art of alchemy is best described by Stanislas Klossowski de Rola in his pictorial work on the Great Work:

"Alchemy is a rainbow bridging the chasm between the earthly and heavenly planes, between matter and spirit...alchemy, the royal sacerdotal art, also called the hermetic philosophy, conceals, in esoteric texts and enigmatic emblems, the means of penetrating the very secrets of Nature, Life, and Death, of Unity, Eternity and Infinity.

Viewed in the context of these secrets, that of gold making is, relatively speaking, of little consequence: something comparable to the super-powers (*siddhis*) sometimes obtained by Great Yogis, which are sought not after for their own sake, but are important by-products of high spiritual attainment." - *Alchemy* by S.K. de Rola.

## The Stages of the Work

The Great Work, or *Magnum Opus*, of spiritual and physical regeneration as suggested by the works on alchemy say that the process consists of seven or twelve stages, which are repeated over and over again until perfection is obtained. These stages are first done in the World of Plants, the Metals, and finally Minerals. Some schools, including that of Paracelsus, suggest work in the animal realm, however, this is often shunned by many practitioners.

The stages are said by many to represent the stages Nature herself took during the initial stages of creation. This is also represented in the Cosmos by the twelve signs of the zodiac, in the human organism by the seven major, and five minor (for a total of twelve), psycho-spiritual centers called *chakras* in Sanskrit. These centers are also linked to the endocrine and nervous systems in human beings.

Thus, both the study of astrology, the astrological timings of experiments (at least in the beginning), and esoteric meditations, similar to yoga, for the rising of spiritual energy known as *kundalini*, are part of the alchemists discipline. The alchemist is in essence, a mystic, astrologer, and magician.

This is the critical point, for to attempt to separate out the physical actions of the alchemist without the interior exercises and projections of them on or into the physical realm of the laboratory, is to reduce it to mundane chemistry.

For alchemy to be alchemy, the *Al*, or divine aspect, must always be present in the consciousness of the operator.

### **The Early Years**

While Egypt is attributed with being the home of alchemy, and its god Thoth, or Hermes in his Greek incarnation, being the Father of Alchemy, other lands have contributed as well. China and India both have highly developed laboratory alchemical traditions that have been practiced in unbroken lines since their inception.

It is in the West however, that we see some of the most fascinating aspects of the Art developed. Here, Babylonian, Chaldean, Egyptian, Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic methods were worked side by side. Through Arab trade, Chinese and Indian methods most likely were also introduced into the Middle East, and ultimately Europe. These diverse traditions were ultimately amalgamated in an attempt to discover the process for creating the Philosopher's Stone.

This is the Stone of the Wise said to confer the ability to transmute base metals into gold, prolong life, and cure all diseases. With it, the Elixir of Immortality could be attained.

This idea of a Stone, of actual physical object as a means of bringing about dramatic changes in the health and well being of an individual, is the basis for most experiments in all three Kingdoms that the alchemist will progressively work through.

### **Sulphur, Salt, and Mercury**

In alchemy everything is composed of three parts: Sulphur (Soul or individualized essence), Mercury (Life Force), and Salt (Physical Body). It is the Work of the alchemist to separate and recombine these three basic principles as often as necessary until are in perfect proportion and harmony with each other. When this harmony is achieved, the creation of a 'stone' of physical object used in the transformation of the alchemist, or another, via a medium, such as water, wine, or direct contact will be produced.

In the Plant Kingdom, the physical body of the plant itself is the Salt, its essential oil are the Sulphur, and alcohol (and occasionally water) is the Mercury.

Thus, the aspiring alchemist seeks to separate these three parts and recombine then, giving rise to the phrase used by Paracelsus, *spagyrics*. Spagyrics is Greek for "separate and recombine" and is the term given to plant work, or the Lesser Circulation. The Greater Circulation consists of metallic and mineral work, its process follows the same principles as plant work, and is generally undertaken only after a certain degree of plant mastery has been attained.

While much can be gained from the theoretical study of spagyrics, it is only in the actual conducting of experiments that any meaningful degree of insight and growth can be attained. For this reason, the following experiments have been given so that would be alchemists can try it for themselves, without the heavy investment in laboratory equipment during their trial period. The methods given and time for

completion reflect this simple, low-tech, approach. In some cases, however, with proper glassware and heat source, the time required can be dramatically reduced.

### **Experiments for the Beginning Student of the Art**

The production of a spagyric tincture is the first and easiest of all operations. It requires no special equipment, and can be done by anyone anywhere, needing only patience and perseverance as its primary tools.

For the sake of brevity, an example of a tincture will be given, with a specific herb - Lemon Balm (*Mellissa Officianalis*), although any plant can be used. Careful consideration must be taken into account as to the plants toxicity; as such, those listed at the end of this work are those most commonly used and are non-toxic.

For each operation one (1) ounce (52 grams) of the dried herb will be needed. Unless otherwise stated, the bulk herb will consist mostly of leaves, some stem, and occasionally the roots of the plant specified. If you are unsure as to the content, either ask the herbalist you are purchasing it from, or grow your own and pick it yourself. I say grow your own herbs, then you will know positively the identity of the plant. While very few people die each year from plant mis-identification while wild crafting, picking plants in the wild, it does one no good to be among those dozen or so who make a fatal error. Be safe, buy it dried, or grow it yourself.

If dried herbs are not available, fresh plants may be substituted. Alchemists have personal preferences as to when and where to use fresh versus dried plants. Experience will help you sort this out later on. For now, either plant will suffice for this experiment.

In addition, four (4) to eight (8) ounces of pure grain alcohol will be needed. In some states purchasing grain alcohol is illegal, and in others, only 190 proof, or 95% pure alcohol, is available. The 190 proof is sufficient, and the most commonly used in plant work for beginners. If neither of these is available, vodka can be substituted, or alcohol can be distilled from red wine, or strong brandy.

**Note:** Distilling alcohol from wine maybe illegal in some states. Check if you think this may be a problem.

A wide mouthed jar, such as used in canning, along with a lid, and plastic food wrap, aluminum foil, fine mesh filter, and/or coffee filter and funnel. A mortar and pestle are optional, but desirable. A coffee grinder is also helpful.

### **Basic Spagyric Tincture**

Begin the operation in the planetary hour of the ruling planet of the herb. Here, that is Jupiter, since *mellissa* is traditionally ruled by that planet. While planetary hours come several times a day for each planet, the first, and often easiest, is to begin with in a few minutes of sunrise on the day of the ruling planet. Since Mellissa is ruled by Jupiter, and Jupiter rules Thursday, the first planetary hour of Jupiter would occur immediately after sunrise on Thursday. Start with prayers to God that the mysteries may be revealed to you and your place in the Universe restored. After interior preparation has been completed, take the herb and begin grinding it by

hand, or in the small quantities in the mortar and pestle. Make it as fine a powder as possible, focusing on the idea that you are releasing the Divine Power in the herb as well as within yourself through the Work. If there is not enough time to grind all of the herb by hand, or it is too tough, such as a seed or root, then grind it partially in the coffee grinder. Here it is important that you spend some time with the herb in physical contact with you, as well as in the beneficial contact with your energy field or aura. If you must grind it entirely by machine, then place it in the mortar and grind it with the pestle anyhow, focusing on developing the energetic relationship between yourself, the herb, the planet ruling it, and that planet's counterpart in your psyche and body.

When the powder is finished, place it in the jar, and slowly, with concentration, pour the grain alcohol over the herb, until it is saturated with fluid and an additional equal to that (2 -4 'fingers') is also in the container. The jar should not be more than 1/2 to 2/3rds full of fluid at most, as room is needed for expansion as the contents heat during the maceration process.

The fluid inside will evaporate as it heats, and condense as it is not capable of escaping. This will cause the fluid to get darker with each passing day. This coloration, or *tincturing*, is the extraction of the Sulphur-Soul property, from the Salt-physical plant matter, by the Mercury-alcohol medium.

The fluid should not touch metal, and if needed, cover the mouth of the jar with food wrap prior to sealing it tightly with the lid. Wrap it in foil, as it can see no light, and place it somewhere warm, and shake it vigorously once or twice a day. Continue this process for one to two weeks, until the color of the tincture is dark.

Remember, that this is your 'Philosophical Child' and must be treated with love and respect. Each time you handle it, for inspection, shaking, or in any fashion, remember that it is a physical representation of your soul-personality. Treat it no different than you would treat yourself, or better, a small animal, child, or house guest. As you separate the Sulphur from the murky sludge of the herbal mass, so are you separating your Soul from the constraints of physical life and incarnation.

It is the attitude of the operator, more than the process itself, that makes alchemy divine. This attitude is literally transferred to the matter being acted upon, just as if it were a patient receiving magnetic or spiritual healing. When the final product is then consumed, we are taking into ourselves a veritable consumable talisman, like that which is suggested by the Christian Mass, only this our Body (Salt) and Blood (Mercury) regenerated, to receive the power of Christ (spiritual power, or Sulphur).

Each time we repeat the process, we are regenerated by minute degrees closer to perfection.

After the color of the liquid is sufficiently dark, pour it off, being careful to strain or filter it, then press out the remaining fluid from the plant matter.

This tincture now contains the Sulphur (essential oils, waxes, and vegetable fats) and the Mercury (alcohol and some water) of the Lemon Balm.

Take the plant mass, or *feces*, also called the *caput mortum* or *dead head*, outside and ignite it in a heat resistant container outside. Place the container upon some bricks if needed, to act as a heat shield for the surface area underneath, such as grass or even exterior carpeting. Have on hand a pair of oven mittens and a large pot lid. The pot lid is to smother the flames if necessary, as well as to protect the dried ash from blowing away in a sudden breeze. For this operation, a large, deep container used for baking, is ideal. Metal can also be used here, as our concern is not with what may be drawn out of the ashes, but out of the tincture.

The smoke released from the burning plant residue will be significant, as such, if it is done inside, make sure that the exhaust fan on your stove is functioning.

After the matter (Salt) has cooled, place it in a heat proof dish, covered if possible, and heat it in the oven at 500 or more degrees Fahrenheit until it has turned to a grey-white, or completely white powder. Frequent grinding of the Salt will assist in this process. The finer the particles during the maceration process, the more Sulphur extracted; the finer the particles during the heating, or calcining, process, the easier it is to get the grey-white or white stages of purification..

Keeping the Salt separate, place a few grains of it in a teaspoon (or 1-2ml/10-20 drops) of the tincture, in a glass of distilled water. This should be during the planetary hour, on the planetary day ruling the herb, in this case, Thursday.

While the Salts need not be consumed with the tincture, they will assist in the overall effects of the operation.

Above all, remember the sacredness of the operation you have performed. Its intended regeneration: physically, psychologically, and spiritually, through the assistance of the tincture as a manifestation of your spiritual power. Some alchemists combine this aspect of the Work with kabbalistic or astrological invocations, similar to what is done for talismans, to intensify the desired effects.

## **The Ens**

According to Paracelsus, the *Ens* is among the most powerful medicines, and yet one of the easiest to make. The *ens*, or *entia* (plural), is an influence, or principle that effects us, and is a definite spiritual, psychic, or physical thing. While five such principles are designated as creating illness within us, the *ens* tincture, created from the Vegetable Kingdom, can be used to correct these imbalances and bring us physical and psychic health.

One author writes, "The *Ens* manifests the highest initiatic virtue of the plant it is made from."

## **Spiritual Initiation**

"The only initiation which I preach and seek with all the ardour of my soul is that by which we may enter into the heart of God and make God's heart enter into us, there to form an indissoluble marriage, which will make us the friend, brother, and spouse of our Divine Redeemer. There is no other mystery to arrive at this holy initiation than to go down into the depths of our being, and not let go till we can bring forth

the living vivifying root, because then all the fruit will be produced within us and without us naturally." -*Louis Claude de St.-Martin*, 18<sup>th</sup> century French mystic and philosopher.

It is this initiatic aspect then, that we seek when we create and ingest the Ens of a particular plant. Authorities seemingly disagree on the nature of spagyric medicines when it comes to this point. At least one authority claims that initiation is the sole goal of alchemical product. Others, particularly Frater Albertus, Bacstrom, and Manfred Junius suggest that powerful medicines for physical illness may be produced using the alchemical process. A middle ground has also been offered, stating that the creator of the product realizes more of a spiritual benefit from its ingestion, while another may realize more of a physical benefit from its use. Hermetic tradition and tales also suggest this, as well as the possibility of the recipient, who has not assisted in the medicines creation, reacting much more strongly at the sudden increase in their overall vibratory rate, some even violently in the case of the higher and more potent metallic and mineral medicines. As a qualifier, it might be that anyone who does not involve themselves in spiritual or esoteric activities on a regular basis will find either a more physical reaction, or a more violent shock to the effects of the medicine.

If initiation then is the goal objective of the ens, what then is initiation? Why should we seek it?

The nature of esoteric initiation is often mis-construed by those who seek, and even often, by those who would pretend to grant it! It is suffice to say the initiation is the beginning of a new aspect of our interior development. One may have interior experiences, initiation however sets them apart, by making them progressive in their function, intensity, and purpose. Thus, one can say, that the whole of initiation is to assist us in having and understanding our *progressive interior experiences*. This however can be a bit of a stumbling block. Many schools, orders, and societies offer initiations into their various degrees, complete with beautiful rituals, titles, and what not. However, the student of alchemy, will most likely have realized by the time they begin their alchemical studies, that these exterior initiations are but ritualized shadows, imitations, promises of things to come, for real, true, and lasting initiation is only had from within.

But then we ask, are the two always separate? Are all external rituals essentially poor imitations of an interior state? No, by no means is that an absolute. Unfortunately, for a ritual initiation to work, to have its intended effect, the initiator, or initiators if it is a large ceremony, must be higher in psychic vibration than the one receiving the psychic impulse. In our modern society, this is rarely the case.

Since alchemy has no set rituals, no lodges, or methods of advancement other than the Work itself, all initiation is said to be interior in this form of esotericism. We initiate ourselves into the Work, and the Work initiates us to higher (and deeper) levels of consciousness. To those who would object to this statement, ponder just this one question: "Are we not always our own initiator?" That is, are we not solely responsible for our starting, progressing, and finishing the Path? Is it not our own Higher Self that prompts us onward? It is from this Higher Self that in meditation, dreams, and sudden flashes of lucidity and clarity that we are initiated; initiated that is, back into the presence of our True Self, the center and origin of our Being.

In this light, an initiation may come to us, and it may be completely devoid of ritual or ceremony. It may be a sudden event that changes our life completely, and directs inward. It may even be a veritable incarnation of a kabbalistic or alchemical pathworking, unfolding around us. In the end however, as the word implies, initiation is only the beginning of the new stage of development, and that phase is only completed when we have been initiated into the next phase, at the hand of our Interior Master, our very Soul. It gives us little good to go around collecting ritual initiations at the hands of would be, or even authentic masters, as these are not things which one can hang on the wall like a diploma. It is best if we focus our energies on a singular path, and complete it, instead of running around looking for short cuts, and getting nowhere.

We then, as ego's seeking the interior state of the spiritual, can only prepare ourselves for initiation, present ourselves at the door of the interior Temple, and knock. It is said, "Knock and it shall be opened to you; ask and it shall be given." We may knock, ask, wait in patience and silence, but never demand. True interior initiation comes but once, and is experienced only once, for that is all that is needed, as it creates within us a permanent change in consciousness. A permanent change that is at once expansive, unitarian, comprehensive, and evolutionary in nature. It is an ever expanding upward spiral of what Israel Regardie called, Light, Life, Love, Law, and Liberty.

How many initiations we experience is dependent upon our chosen path, be it alchemical, kabbalistic, or both. But even here, the idea of division is more of a function of our exterior consciousness than our interior awareness. We consume both spiritual food and material food in small doses so that we do not choke or get indigestion, yet at the end of the meal, all of the needed food for our growth and survival is consumed. Initiation is the same, in that it is a small chunking of a larger piece of Life Consciousness. We receive in interior initiation exactly what we need for our growth, no more, or less. How many of these small spoon fulls of life we swallow depends on our chosen interior Path and the degree of progress we make on it. Thus, once again, the obligation and responsibility is ours.

In summary though, it might be said that we can be expected to experience an initiation for each plane of Awareness, and one for each of its sub-planes. How this works out mathematically is up for debate. One school of thought suggests that there are twelve planes, seven major, five minor, with each having its own sub-division of five planes, for a total of sixty levels of Being progressively available to us. However, each time we experience an initiation, there is in reality only One Being that is experienced, and our awareness of that One is expanded. To be concerned with the numbers or one's place in creation before it is revealed to you is to feed the ego, not the soul.

Kabbalistic schools suggest ten planes of awareness, as do some Buddhist schools, with each one divided into four sub-planes, with a singular unifying plane at the end. Thus, each sphere can be said to have its own Earth, Water, Air, Fire, and Spirit aspects. Each plane corresponds to a planetary level, quality, or power, with the exception of the first two. In kabbalah, they represent the original primordial unity, and its expansion as the first phase of creation. Hereafter, they take on the symbolic planetary titles of Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, the Moon, and the Earth.

The nature of spagyric tinctures, and in particular the *ens*, is to clear out the blocks in our psychic makeup and anatomy, similar to what is called *nadis* in yoga or the *meridians* in acupuncture. This subtle anatomy allows for the exchange of information between the dense physical world of matter, the end point of creation, and the subtler psychic world of which it is an extension. In creation there are no breaks, gaps, or holes, such exist only in our knowledge or realization of Nature. By effecting change on this subtle in-between level, often called etheric, we can increase the flow and quality of energy from these slightly finer worlds 'above', to our physical world 'below'.

With each corresponding increase in intensity, an initiation can be said to have taken place, if of course, the energy become permanently available to us, and is no just a temporary jump to a higher level.

W.E. Butler states that the these psychic nerve channels exist in the planet as well as humanity, in the form of ley lines. The natural power of creation, or *kundalini*, as it is called in Sanskrit, is the force which continually changes all of creation, moving it forward to more and more refined levels. When we create and ingest spagyric or alchemical products, we are assisting Nature, in the quickening of our personal evolutionary process.

"Kundalini works in the prematter on the etheric levels; and, as all substances, and all elements have their bases in this prematter, they can be approached from that angle if you know how to adjust and direct Kundalini."

Elsewhere he adds:

"Kundalini power allows us to have control over what we call inanimate nature. Not that there is anything really inanimate. There is life in all matter; nothing is dead. There are simply degrees of life: it's in a trance in the rock; it sleeps in the vegetable; it awakens in the animal; and it becomes consciousness in mankind. One Life behind all things. So you see we carry a lot of potentiality within us."

### **Creation of the Ens**

Like our basic tincture previously described, an Ens tincture can be made for each of the seven planetary rulers, for each day of the week. Thus, it is through the herb, ruled or influenced by a particular planet, that we seek initiation into the sphere or world ruled by that planet. However, unlike a plant stone, which we discuss next, the Ens has a lesser initiatic power, although it is still quite surprising. In the plant stone, the four aspects of or elements of Earth, Air, Water, and Fire are in balance. In the Ens, the Fire element is predominant, for reasons which we shall see. The advantage lies however, in the simplicity of their creation, allowing anyone, regardless of their level of experience, to create and Ens tincture.

From another perspective, the Ens may be seen as comparable to Elixers, in which the tincture has been 'exalted' through repeated processing and in which its calcined Salts have been added to the procedure. However, elixers almost always contain several species of plants as well.

While several methods exist for the creation of the Ens, the following method is easy, safe, and requires no special equipment.

The same materials are used as previously described. In addition, about 1 ½ pounds of potassium carbonate will be needed, and a glass dish no less than one inch deep.

Spread the potassium carbonate in a thin layer inside the glass dish, no more than ¼ of an inch thick (1-2 cm.).

Caution should be taken to avoid exposure to the potassium carbonate in either its dry state or when it becomes liquified through exposure to the night air. It is toxic and can cause a rash, or burning of the mucous membranes. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling to avoid any accidental exposure or contamination of your eyes or other sensitive areas. The potassium carbonate will also etch the sides of the glass container it used during this experiment.

Place the tray in an area where it will be exposed to the night air. As potassium carbonate (or Salt of Tartar) liquefies (becomes deliquescent), it absorbs the water carried in the night air. This water, or humidity, is the vehicle of Universal Fire, called *prana* (in Sanskrit), and is most easily obtained in the spring and summer months.

This Universal Fire is what sets both our personal and planetary Kundalini into action on various levels.

Those with kabbalistic training in ritual magic will see a similarity in the idea presented here with the Elemental attributes of the so-called magic circle. The Prana, (Ruach in Hebrew, Spiritus in Latin) is the Vital Life energy carried in the Air (the East) from which we extract the vital principle, or experience it as Fire (the South) by means of Water (the West) and capture it in the physical medium of the Earthly herb (the North).

Decant or filter off the liquid each morning, being sure to avoid its exposure to the sun, or a direct water source, such as rain. To do this, use either a syringe, large dropper, turkey baster, or lab pipette.

**Caution:** Never pipette by mouth!!

When four to five ounces (150-200ml) have been collected, you can begin the first ens tincture. To avoid too much loss of this precious liquid, through filtering, you may want to collect it in a jar or flask and then filter it all at once prior to use.

**Remember:** it will etch the glass it is stored in as well. Make sure you seal the storage jar tightly to prevent the liquid from absorbing any additional fluid from the surrounding air.

Place one ounce (52 grams) or between 50 and 60 grams of finely ground herb in a fresh jar and pour in the clear fluid you have collected and filtered. Once again, remember that beginning the operation on the planetary day and/or hour of the planet ruling the herb will assist you in your Work. Pour in enough fluid to cover the top of the herb and to allow for thorough shaking. Depending on the dryness absorbent nature of the herb chosen, this can be from 100ml to 200ml of the

collected "Oil of Tartar" per herb for adequate coverage. If any "Oil of Tartar" remains save it for future use.

Pour in an equal amount of grain alcohol and shake daily to insure the two liquids mix as the lighter alcohol will float on top. This **alcohol** will be the Ens tincture that is removed after the fluid turns a dark reddish color. **Remember!** The "Oil of Tartar" is caustic and will be unpleasant if swallowed.

Because of the magnetic nature of the deliquescence, it is important that the lid be non-metallic, or that the mouth of the jar be wrapped in plastic food wrap prior to sealing. You may also wish to wrap it in aluminum foil to limit or reduce the amount of psychic contact the liquid receives.

### **How to Use the Ens**

Take ten or at most twenty drops in a glass of preferably distilled water on the day ruled by the planet of the plant in the hour following sunrise. If this is not possible, then in any of the other three planetary hours occurring that day. As before, you may consecrate it prior to consumption with kabbalistic or astrological rituals, as you would do for a talisman.

Because the ens is an initiatic product, it will have an effect on subtle or astral body of the user. Note carefully your dreams in a notebook, as well as the phases of the moon, and any other psychic or coincidental occurrences that may happen.

### **How to Pick a Plant**

For those not wishing to create all seven of the Ens at once, the following may be taken into consideration when picking a plant for your first time.

You may pick a plant based upon its planetary sign, such as one for a quality that you are deficient in.

A Moon ens will open up the psychic world, that of Yetzirah, and Yesod in particular. It may also be used with Pathworkings involving the Moon, the 32<sup>nd</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup>.

An Ens of Lady's Mantel (*Alchemia*) will open up Netzach-Venus, and give information regarding plant alchemy, hence its official name - *Alchemia*.

An ens of the Sun will assist in awakening intuition, self-mastery, and the sphere of Tiphareth in Yetzirah. It may even give glimpses of the Briatic World (the World of Archetypes/Higher Mind). It may also be used in Pathworkings involving the Sun.

An ens of Saturn, particularly Horsetail, may be used in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Path, opening of Briah-Saturn in Yetzirah, and may even give glimpses of the Briatic World and Eternity itself.

### **Notes on the Ens attributed to Paracelsus**

In his biography of Paracelsus, Franz Hartman quotes an unknown manuscript, allegedly in private possession, in which Paracelsus described the creation of the Melissa Ens and its virtues.

"But the Primum Ens Melissae is prepared in the following manner: Take half a pound of pure carbonate of potash, and expose it to the air until it is dissolved (by attracting water from the atmosphere). Filter the fluid, and put as many fresh leaves of the plant *melissa* into it as it will hold, so that the fluid will cover the leaves. Let it stand in a well-closed glass and in a moderately warm place for twenty-four hours. The fluid may then be removed from the leaves, and the latter thrown away. On top of this fluid absolute alcohol is poured, so that it will cover the former to the height of one or two inches, and it is left to remain for one or two days, or until the alcohol becomes of an intensely green color. This alcohol is then to be taken away and preserved, and fresh alcohol is put upon the alkaline fluid, and the operation is repeated until all the coloring matter is absorbed by the alcohol. This alcoholic fluid is now to be distilled, and the alcohol evaporated until it becomes of the thickness of a syrup, which is the Primum Ens Melissae; but the alcohol that has been distilled away and the liquid potash may be used again. The liquid potash must be of great concentration and the alcohol of great strength, else they would become mixed, and the experiment would not succeed."

In a footnote to the above material, Hartman quotes Lesebure, a physician of Louis XIV of France, and his "Guide to Chemistry" (*Chemischer Handleiter*, printed in Nuremburg, 1685, page 276), in which Lesebure describes the following account of an experiment he claims to have witnessed regarding the extended use of the Primum Ens Melissae.

"One of my most intimate friends prepared the Primum Ens Melissae, and his curiosity would not allow him to rest until he had seen with his own eyes the effects of the this arcanum, so that he might be certain whether or not the accounts given of its virtues were true. He therefore made the experiment, first upon himself, then upon an old female servant, aged seventy years, and afterwards upon an old hen that was kept as his house. First he took, every morning at sunrise. A glass of white wine that was tinctured with this remedy, and after using it for fourteen days his finger- and toe- nails began to fall out, without however, causing any pain. He was not courageous enough to continue the experiment, but gave the same remedy to the old female servant. She took it every morning for about ten days, when she began to menstruate again as in former days. At this she was very much surprised, because she did not know that she had been taking a medicine. She became frightened, and refused to continue the experiment. My friend took, therefore, some grain, soaked it in that wine, and gave it to the old hen to eat, and on the sixth day that bird began to lose its feathers, and kept losing them until it was perfectly nude, but before two weeks had passed, new feathers grew, which were much more beautifully colored; her comb stood up again, and she began again to lay eggs."

According to one modern manuscript on alchemy, a similar experiment with *melissae* using a different method of extraction, produced a milder and less violent reaction in the hens it was given to, while increasing their egg weight and production.

While this is not being said to encourage extended use of the tincture, it is from stories such as these that we have the legendary healing and rejuvenating qualities of alchemical products.

Creating an alchemical or spagyric product is among one of the highest and most rewarding activities that a student of esotericism can accomplish.

In the creation of a "Stone" even in the Vegetable Kingdom, the symbolic balancing of the "Elements" is the basis for the functional reality.

With the harmonizing of Sulphur, Salt, and Mercury of the parent plant, the herb is perfected in its potential use as a medium of etheric and astral energy.

### **A Vegetable Stone**

In the creation of a "Stone" even in the Vegetable Kingdom, the symbolic balancing of the "Elements" is the basis for its functional reality. With the harmonizing of the plant's Sulphur, Salt, and Mercury, the herb is perfected in its potential use as a medium of etheric and astral energy.

There are many ways of making a Vegetable Stone. Some of them run from the simple to the complex, each with its own advantages and drawbacks. For brevity, and the increased possibility of success, several brief methods will be outlined.

The effects of the Stone, as suggested previously, are initiatic. While physical health may be effected, their primary purpose, at this stage, is to open up a wider range of consciousness to the student. They also represent, in their own fashion, a certain degree of mastery of the 'Vegetable' (or animal-Nephesh soul) nature of the individual who created them. They can be a profound and powerful gateway to the astral-Yetziric realm, and take us to the doors of Briatic (Solar-Archetypal) initiation.

The creation of all seven planetary stones, and their perfection, represents a physical demonstration of the students mastery of the Astral-Yetziric World.

The process of making a vegetable Stone is similar to that of making a spagyric tincture as previously described. However, instead of having the option of disposing of Salt, here it must be calcined, and kept for future use. If the Salt obtained from the plant matter is insufficient, in some instances, Sea Salt may be used.

Leaching of the Salt may also yield up greater progress in the final stages of balancing the elements. Leaching is accomplished by placing the Salt in a moderate amount of distilled water, and allowing it to evaporate naturally, or with the assistance of a heat lamp or toaster oven. The Salt is then scraped off the container, ground, and re-calcined. Experience has shown that leaching can be done in 15-30 minutes if the Salt is finely spread, and the heat source is close by. A simple desk lamp, with as low as a 7 1/2 watt bulb, will be sufficient.

The Sulphur and Mercury which have previously been together in the tincture, in some instances are separated into their respective aspects. Thus, in the creation of a Stone, we have three separate materials that we will recombine in the alchemical laboratory.

If separation of the Sulphur-oil and Mercury-alcohol is not possible because of equipment limitations, then they may be used together, but this may effect the

quality of the Stone produced. An 'artificial plant Stone' may also be made with Sea Salt, alcohol, and high grade essential oils of the desired plant. Above all, it is important to note that a Vegetable Stone takes time to produce, in some cases up to several months, and will change in color and texture after it is created. Patience, dedication, and confidence are the needed attributes at this stage.

## Method I

Preparation is the key to success in alchemical work. Preparation of the materials needed, the place of working, and above all, of the attitude of the worker. The attitude must be a mixture of humility and unswerving confidence in the ultimate success of the undertaking. An image, if possible, and a feeling to accompany it, of the final moment the product is realized, from beginning to end can only help in its final material realization.

Remember the words of Khunrath, "*Ora et Labora*" - Prayer and Work; and the aphorism on the fourteenth plate of the *Mutus Liber: Ora, lege, lege, lege, relege, labora et invenies* - Pray, read, read, read, reread, work and (you will) discover (it).

Note the order of the directions: Prayer comes first, then reading and re-reading, and finally the material operations.

While the alchemist works alone, or at best with a mate, they do the Work not for themselves alone, but to assist in the relieving of pain and suffering. Their motive is well expressed in the motto of the Knights Templar. It is taken from the 115<sup>th</sup> Psalm and was sung by them in victory: "Non nobis Domine! Non nobis, sed nomini tuo da Gloriam." That is, "Not unto us, O Lord! Not unto us, but unto Thy name give Glory."

## The Stone

The Salt may be calcined ahead of time, or you may wait until the planetary hour on the day of the ruling planet of the herb.

The process of calcining is more complicated than it appears, as the simple burning off of the alcohol will not produce enough heat to ashen the residue. The embers must be made to glow by gently blowing on them, until they are bright orange. Be very careful not to blow hot ashes into your eyes or hair if you chose to increase the heat in this way! Safety goggles should be worn if you are unsure of your ability to control the ash, and a small, fine wire mesh screen placed over the dish used for calcining will help hold the ashes down. This is important as the finer, lighter ash will easily be blown away, and this ash is important for the creation of a Vegetable Stone.

You may also place small amounts of the ash in a crucible and allow the heat from your gas stove to envelope the crucible. Tongs will be needed as the crucible will grow very hot.

Several kitchen hot pads and gloves will also be helpful to have on hand.

Let the ashes cool, then grind them. Soak them in alcohol again, and repeat the process. By the fourth or fifth burning you might achieve the proper white, or grey-white color needed to proceed.

If the Salt has been prepared ahead of time, that is before the planetary hour, place it in a heat resistant dish or crucible on a low heat source. The heat may be modulated, but under no circumstances let it burn or scorch the herb.

Slowly, drop by drop begin to place the tincture into the heated Salt until it is completely absorbed. This is called imbibition, or imbibing the Stone with life (Mercury) and Soul (Sulphur). You are in essence, reincarnating the vegetable power of the plant.

Continue this process for as long as you like, or stop after one full hour, either planetary or secular. Begin again either next week, or on another day, preferably Saturday, on the planetary hour of the plant. If this is inconvenient, then any hour when the Work can be done. Between the phases of imbibition, keep the Stone in a place away from prying eyes, and if possible sunlight. Whether it be in the womb or under the earth, many good things like to grow in the dark.

When the Stone will accept no more liquid then place it where you can observe the changes that may take place over the next few months. If possible, store it near a heat source, such as an incubator, or even a gas range oven with a running pilot light if it is available.

If the Stone suddenly jells, quickly pour it out of the crucible into a thimble, as it will harden and difficult to get out of the porcelain crucible. This is desirable, over the softer, easily consumable Stones that may appear. If the Stone is soft like liquorice, then it may be ingested in small slivers under the tongue, or with a glass of distilled water.

If the Stone is hard, then place it in a glass of distilled water for several minutes so that it may transfer its power to the water, then drink the water. If the Stone is perfected, repeated immersion will not degrade or 'attack' the Stone. Otherwise, expect it to dissolve over time.

It is imperative that you keep a careful record of the days, times, and phases of the moon, during which the Work is done. It is strongly urged that Work not be done during the 'dark phase' of the moon. New and full moon periods are most beneficial, as with most psychic activities or projects.

In this regard, Dion Fortune states:

"It is the light of the moon which is the stimulative factor in these etheric activities, and as the Earth and Moon share one etheric double, all etheric activities are at their most active when the Moon is at its full. Likewise, during the dark of the Moon, etheric energy is at its lowest, and unorganized forces have a tendency to rise up and give trouble. The Dragon of the Qliphoth raises his multiple heads. In consequence, practical occult work is best let alone during the dark by all but experienced workers. The life giving forces are relatively weak and the unbalanced forces relatively strong; the results, in inexperienced hands, is chaos.

While Dion Fortune was a Qabalist and a ritual magician and not a laboratory alchemist, her words are still applicable. As we will later see, the relationship between kabbalah and alchemy is very close.

## **Method II**

If Salts from the plant used to make the tincture are not available, then an 'artificial Stone' may be made in its place using a similar process.

In place of the calcined residue, sea salt is soaked in rain water and dried several times, being crushed with mortar and pestal between cycles. The aura and energy radiating from the hands of the alchemist are most crucial in the Work. That is why during the handling of the Salt and tincture, the attitude of the alchemist is so important; as well as why alchemists work alone undisturbed by inquisitive and disruptive thoughts of others.

While it should not have to be said to someone interested in alchemical, kabbalistic, or hermetic work, we will state again to drive the point home: thoughts are real things on their way to becoming tangible in our material world. It is for this reason that we mentally wrap ourselves in a blanket or veil to psychically isolate ourselves from the disruptive psychic energy from others, and our products in aluminum foil when they are completed. Alcohol is very susceptible to psychic vibrations, as is cold water, and both act as storage mediums for those concentrated energies.

Consider this the next time your are in a bar, or drinking an alcoholic beverage. In Alcoholics Anonymous, it is said that the recovering addict must avoid 'stinking thinking' as that is what drives them back to drinking and drugging. When you consider that many alcoholics sit and stew over what is bothering them, ice cold drink clutched between their hands, deep in an inner contemplation of failure, anger, and self-destruction, and then consume their 'desecrated talisman's' one after the other, is it any surprise that alcohol and drug abuse is so destructive to the body and soul of individuals and society?

If you chose not to soak the sea salt, then crush it, imagining that it, like the plant Salt, is opening itself up to the creative powers of the tincture, or Cosmic Energy and Consciousness.

On the appropriate planetary day and hour, begin the imbibing process with a dropper, first with grain alcohol until saturated, and then essential oil. Repeat several times, and proceed as discussed in the previous method.

## **Sea Salt and Alchemy**

Modern salt refining techniques are indebted to the ancient alchemists for much of their methods. The sea and its symbols have been rich inspiration for alchemist and mystics of all periods. It is not surprising then to learn, that the ocean itself, the very source from which our physical bodies have arisen, is also the source of much of our food stuffs, as well as potential medicines. The salty waters of *Eaux-Meres*, or "Mother Waters", is the basis of our plasma, amniotic water, and all of our body fluids. For this reason, only sea salt, and only sea salt which is naturally refined and collected (i.e. organic) is suitable for this work. Salt mined from deep inland, or strip

mined off the beaches is "alchemically polluted" and will not do for this work of rejuvenation. Salt produced in the slow, natural manner contains over 84 trace minerals, many of which are absent when the speedier more economically methods of mass production are employed.

### **Suggestions for Study**

Before engaging in any of the experiments outlined here, read and re-read the material several times with a notebook nearby. Outline the steps in each technique, and place them on the front page of your notebook. When performing the experiments, pay attention to your notes, and write down each step as you take it. Compare your list with master list your notebooks, as well as the steps listed here. This may seem trivial, but it is designed to get you in the habit of noting down what you do, as you do it, so that later on, if you decide to do more complex experiments, the required safety and notation habits will have already been formed. As stated earlier, plant work is relatively safe, if you mislabel something you can throw it out or test it under your tongue, metallic work is much less forgiving. Good habits formed early last a lifetime. Not to mention, they save a lot of work later!

### **Conclusion**

Alchemy is a lifelong process. The procedures outlined here are sufficient to keep an aspiring spagyrist busy for at least a year or more. Spagyric medicines when taken over time have an accumulative effect. While the individual dose may wear off after a week or so, each time it is ingested the organs of spiritual perception are flexed a little more. Like any study worth undertaking, patience, confidence, faith, and Grace are the tools needed. In the, it is ourselves we transmute, the plants are just our helpers along the Way of Return.

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This article is adapted from the forthcoming title, *A Short Course in Plant Alchemy* by Mark Stavish, M.A.