

Hermetic Alchemy – Science and Practice
THE ALCHEMICAL PROCESS
Digestion – Distillation – Sublimation – Putrefaction

This lesson deals with the second four of the twelve stages of the Great Work: DIGESTION, DISTILLATION, SUBLIMATION, and PUTREFACTION. DIGESTION corresponds to Leo; DISTILLATION to Virgo, SUBLIMATION to Libra, and PUTREFACTION to Scorpio.

The fifth stage of the work is DIGESTION. Since it corresponds to Leo, it corresponds to the letter Teth, and to these attributions:

The Intelligence of the Secret of all Spiritual Activities; the sense of Taste; the function of Digestion; the direction North-Above; Tarot Key 8, STRENGTH.

Chemically, digestion is the exposure of a substance to the action of a liquid with the aid of heat. By this means the soluble constituents are extracted from the substance. Thus digestion requires two elements, fire and water.

The water is the cosmic mental energy, called water because it flows in streams, has currents, vibrates like waves, has tides, and is like a mirror or reflector.

Alchemical fire is the electric, vital force which takes form as solar radiance and heat. It is the animating principle of all creatures. It is called fire because its action breaks down and consumes the forms through

which it becomes manifest.

On the Qabalistic Tree of Life, the letter Teth joins Chesed, to which water is attributed, to Geburah, which is of the fiery quality. Thus the "Intelligence of the Secret" is the secret of the combination of these two occult elements. Chesed is also known as the Sphere of Jupiter, or the field of the operation of that aspect of the Life-power which is centered in that part of the sympathetic nervous system known as the solar plexus, or Jupiter center. Geburah is called the Sphere of Mars, or the field of the operation of that aspect of the Life-power focused in the Mars center.

Thus we may expect to find that in digestion, as understood in alchemy, there is a blending of the forces of the Jupiter and Mars centers. The field of the operation of the Jupiter center is physiologically related to the stomach, which is the seat of the bodily function of digestion. The Mars force has control of the entire muscular structure of the body, and is active also in the brain. This force, too, is specialized in the reproductive functions, and as the serpent-power, is what the yogis raise, or sublime.

Now, the meaning of Teth is "serpent" and the Intelligence of the Secret has to do with the raising of the serpent-power, and its transformation into the white Eagle, as an alchemist would phrase it. Note here that the eagle is the bird of Jupiter, so that the essential nature of the alchemical work is seen to be the transformation of Mars into Jupiter. It is therefore the

transformation of that phase of activity represented by Key 16 in Tarot into what is represented by Key 10. What is this, if it be not the transformation of the destructive force which overthrows form into that perfect comprehension of Reality which is also the perfect fulfillment of our desires?

On this point Ripley, in the Epistle preceding his *Compound of Alchemy* says "Therefore work only kind with kind, and join all your elements so that they do not strive. Bear also in mind this point, that you turn passive natures into active. Make living substance of water, fire, air and earth; and of the quadrangle make you a round figure."

The quadrangle, or square, refers to the four elements. These are to be turned into living substance, sometimes called the quintessence. Now, the tower of Key 16 is built on a square base, and the number 16 is a square number. But note that 16 is the number of cells in the magic square of Jupiter, so that the number of the Key which refers to Mars is a number related to Jupiter. Furthermore, $16 = 1 + 6 = 7$, and the sum of the numbers from 0 to 7 is $28 = 2 + 8 = 10$, so that there is an occult mathematical correspondence between 16 and 10. Again, the sum of the numbers from 0 to 16 is 136, and $1 + 3 + 6 = 10$. Finally, 136 the extension of 16, is the number of the name CHSMAL, Hasmael, the Intelligence of Jupiter. So that all these points show you that the correspondence between Mars and Jupiter is plainly indicated in the Tarot.

On the title page of Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* is a symbolic engraving. It shows a star of twenty-two rays, with a glory behind it. On the three lower rays sits a toad, holding up a lunar crescent. Between the horns of the crescent is a solar disc, which a serpent, head downward, seems to be holding in his mouth. The serpent is coiled in a love-knot, suggesting the outline of a horizontal figure 8, and from the center of the love-knot an eagle rises. From the eagle sixty-five drops of dew descend. A Latin motto beneath reads "Serpens et Bufo gradiens sub terram, Aquila volans, est nostrum Magisterium." It means "a serpent and a toad coming up above the earth (literally "stepping up above") is our Magistry.

The toad is an animal under the rulership of Saturn, as one may read in Henry Cornelius Agrippa. The serpent, twisted in the form described above, is one of many symbols of the force used in the Great Work. The sublimation of the matter begins at the Saturn center, which is at the base of the spine, and thus corresponds to the position of the toad in this emblem. The twenty-two rays of the star correspond to the twenty-two letters and twenty-two Tarot Keys. The serpent is the Mars force. The flying eagle is the transmuted serpent, as we see in Keys 10 and 21 of the Tarot. The 65 drops of dew are the "dew of heaven", and their number, besides representing the word ADNI, Lord, is the number of HIKL, Temple, and of GM-ICHd, "Together in unity."

In his preface to this book, Ashmole says that by means of the Stone it is possible to discover any person in any

part of the world, though never so secretly hidden. "In a Word," he writes, "it fairely presents to your view even the *whole World*, wherein to *behold, heare, or see your Desire*. Nay more, It enables Man to understand the Language of the Creatures, as the Chirping of Birds, Lowing of Beasts, etc. To Convey a Spirit into an Image, which by observing the Influence of the Heavenly Bodies, shall become a true Oracle; and yet this, as E. A. assures you, is not any wayes Necromanticall, or Devilish; but easy, wondrous easy, Natural and Honest."

Compare this with the descriptions of the powers of the yogi in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. What is meant is that he who makes the Stone of the Wise can enter into the consciousness of any phase of nature, and project that consciousness into any part of the world. This consciousness, as Ashmole says, presents the whole world to our view, whereas our present state of consciousness shows us only a part.

Alchemical digestion, then, is a combination of fire and water which extracts the soluble elements from the matter. It is pictured by Key 8 of Tarot as the taming of a lion by a woman, who opens the lion's mouth. The woman, moreover, leads the lion by a chain of roses, fashioned like a horizontal figure 8, and the same horizontal 8 is shown over her head.

Ashmole tells us, furthermore, that the finest aspect of the Stone, which he terms the Angelical Stone, is so subtle that it can neither be seen, felt, or weighed; but tasted only. This is the "dew of heaven," the nectar of

which the yogis speak so often. Yet that nectar is made when the woman tames the lion, or when the serpent is transformed into the eagle. The sense of taste is a metaphysical sense, developed by continual practice.

Alchemical digestion is also connected with the direction North-Above, which combines North, represented in Tarot by Key 16, with Above, represented by Key 1. Thus it becomes evident that the work of digestion combines the functions of the Mercury center (the Magician) with those of the Mars center (The Tower.) Yet the self-consciousness focused in the Mercury center does not act directly upon the Mars force. It must have an agent, and that agent is the alchemical Woman, pictured in Key 8. To the Woman the qualities of the Man must be transferred. That is to say, the seed-ideas *selected* by self-consciousness must be implanted in sub-consciousness, through whose agency the subhuman forms of the Life-power are brought under control.

All this is related to the sign Leo, which rules the heart, and is thus connected with circulation. The red lion of Key 8 is sometimes interpreted as meaning sublimated Sulphur, combined with Mercury. This is quite true. But as a lion he represents the Sun, or alchemical gold; and his redness is from Mars. Note that the color of the lion is the color of the Magician's outer garment, and that this color means strength, courage, activity, and the like – all Martian qualities. What is meant is that the forces of Mars and the Sun have been combined.

In the technical alchemical sense, this is just what happens at this stage of the work. For the outcome of the process pictured in Key 8 is to blend the forces in the body which come from the Mars center and the Sun center respectively. The Sun, or heart, center is the point at which the undifferentiated cosmic radiance enters into the field of personality. The Mars center just below the navel is the most active of the lower centers of the serpent-power. When the currents from these two centers are combined, and directed by the alchemical Woman, as shown in Key 8, the result is the alchemical process of digestion, which releases certain subtle substances into the blood-stream, and thus provides the necessary energy for the subsequent stages of the work.

As I have written elsewhere "The outcome of this process (pictured in Key 8) is that one sees that his personality is a center of expression for the power which really controls everything. In consequence of this perception, the man who has it sees that there is nothing anywhere to fear. Then, since he has nothing to fear he sees that he has everything to love. Masters of life are invariably distinguished by their fearlessness, and by their unaffected love of all creatures and things. This is real love, without attachment. 'Love your enemies,' to the adept, is no mere counsel of perfection, no unattainable ideal. It sums up his daily practice of life. He is enemy to none, and neither picks nor chooses the objects of his all-embracing affection.

"Strife is at an end in the presence of such a man. Wild beasts will not harm him, nor each other, while he is

near. He has mastered the serpent in his own personality, and no external serpent will ever injure him. It is not that wild animals are cowed by him, as by a lion-tamer. It is because he inspires no fear in them that they offer him no harm. This is literally true, and the same law applies to the metaphorical wild beasts of passion and desire. "

The sixth stage of the work is DISTILLATION. It corresponds to the sign Virgo, and thus to the letter Yod, which has these attributions:

The Intelligence of Will; the sense of Touch; the function of Coition; the direction North-Below; Tarot Key 9, THE HERMIT.

Distillation is the process of separating volatile from less volatile compounds. Metaphysically it is sometimes interpreted as the release of the soul from the limitations of the body; but this is only a partial explanation of the meaning of alchemical distillation. Through its connection with the sign Virgo, this stage of the work is related primarily to the element of earth, and as a matter of fact the distillation is primarily a physiological process which occurs in that part of the human body ruled by Virgo.

Virgo governs the organs of the abdominal region, and particularly those which have to do with the process of assimilation. In a sense, what physiologists know as assimilation is the foundation of the alchemical distillation. Ripley, it will be remembered, tells the

would-be alchemist to make *living substance* of the four elements, and to make the quadrangular into a round figure. The four elements, outside our bodies, seem to be inert and lifeless. When we take them in the form of food, water, breath and light, and incorporate them into our organisms, they become living substance. Furthermore they are changed from the inorganic form, symbolized by the square or quadrangle into component parts of our interior *circulation*, symbolized by the wheel of Key 10.

In discussing the "Virgin's Milk" in an earlier lesson, I touched upon this whole matter, and showed that the actual substance worked upon in the alchemical operation is, at one stage of its manifestation, the chyle in the small intestine; It is the separation of the subtle essences from chyle, in this region ruled by Virgo, that we mean by alchemical Distillation.

The chyle itself is relatively gross. The essences extracted from it are volatile, moving rapidly from one part of the body to another part. The most important of these subtle essences have not yet been identified by physical science, but they have been known for centuries by yogis in the Orient and alchemists in the Occident. The alchemists call one of these subtle essences *Aurum potabile*, that is, "Gold which may be drunk," or "liquid gold."

What they mean by this is precisely what the yogis mean by the solar current of Prana. This subtle essence is released from chyle by the process of assimilation in

the small intestine. In ordinary human beings only a portion of the fluid gold is taken into the circulation. Yet all of us have some of it. If we did not, we should not be alive.

For this reason, all the alchemical Sages agree with Ripley, who writes: "Fowls and fishes bring it to us, every single man has it. It is everywhere, in you, in me, in every time and space."

But the alchemical adept, by Distillation, charges his blood-stream and his nervous system with a superabundance of this fluid gold. He is enabled to do this because of the fact veiled by the astrological dictum that Virgo is ruled by Mercury, which planet is also exalted in this sign. The practical meaning is that the process of assimilation is under the rulership of the conscious mind.

Primarily, this rule is exerted in the selection of what we eat and drink, and in breath-control. For mark this well, **IT IS THE BREATH WHICH MAKES ASSIMILATION COMPLETE.** Thus Ripley says: "Be moderate in eating and drinking. Do not soften your belly by drinking immoderately, lest you quench your natural heat too soon." This is something for the bellows-blowers to ponder. For if alchemy were performed in an external laboratory, what difference would the physical condition of the alchemist make in the outcome of the work?

Eat moderately. Eat what you like, and what agrees with

you. Find this out by experiment, and by reading sound, scientific explanations of the various food-values. For the alchemical work, eat foods rich in vitamins, especially those rich in Vitamin D. Do not be a faddist. The mental state of a diet-crank forbids his ever succeeding in the Great Work. But when you eat, remember that you are selecting the raw materials for transmutation into the Philosopher's Stone. As a general rule, so far as quantity of food goes, the old yogi rule, "Eat half what can be conveniently eaten," holds good. No general rule, however, applies to all persons.

If you are sick, do not attempt yoga practice or alchemy. Study the theory all you like, but attend to your health first. For the alchemical work demands strength of body, and normal function as its beginning. Remember, the alchemical state of consciousness is supernormal, and you cannot expect to enjoy supernormal states if you haven't normal ones to begin with.

Alchemical Distillation, however, utilizes the rulership of Mercury for more than the selection of food-stuffs. The conscious mind can, through its control of sub-consciousness, bring about tremendous improvement in the work of assimilation. ONE HAS TO KNOW ABOUT IT BEFORE HE CAN DO IT. Those who are in ignorance of the fundamental facts are in no position to do the work. But when one knows, he can make a specific demand upon his sub-consciousness that assimilation of the subtle essences shall be increased. 'This demand should be put in the form of positive affirmations, and if these affirmations are combined

with visual imagery, they will be more potent.

Before you sit down to a meal, tell your sub-consciousness that you are giving it materials for alchemical Distillation. With your mind's, eye see the electric constitution of all that you eat and drink. This is by no means difficult. Once you get the mental conception of the electronic constitution of every kind of physical matter, it will not be hard for you to see that you are eating cosmic electricity, drinking it, and breathing it. Think of it as light. Then think of your blood-stream and nerves as being charged with radiant energy.

In the Qabalah, the letter Yod, which corresponds to Virgo, is associated with the Intelligence of Will This mode of consciousness is "so called because it forms the patterns of all bodies; and by this intelligence, when it is perceived, the pre-existent Wisdom is discovered." Key 9 of Tarot is a commentary upon this. The pre-existent Wisdom is personified as the Hermit. The pattern-forming power is represented by the six-pointed star in the lantern, and the light streaming from the lantern is the Intelligence of Will.

Now, Will-power and Light-power are essentially the same. Furthermore, the universe is ONE, DYNAMIC, LIVING ORGANISM. Then it follows that no part of the universe is unrelated to any other part. The power which forms the patterns of bodies is a power of universal Wisdom, a power of the ONE IDENTITY. That power presents itself to us in the various forms constituting our environment. But the forms blind us,

until we are awakened, to the power itself. The truth is that we are in the presence of ONE, SINGLE REALITY, which *appears* as many things. THE ESSENCE OF THAT REALITY IS THE SELFHOOD OF MAN. A PRIMARY POWER OF THAT REALITY IS TO SHAPE ITS OWN ENERGY INTO FORMS – FORMS PHYSICAL AND FORMS METAPHYSICAL.

The direction assigned to Yod, and therefore related to Distillation, is North-Below. This is a combination of North (Key 16) with Below (Key 2). The centers of the body corresponding are the Mars center just below the navel, and the Moon center, or pituitary body. Psychologically, it is impossible to recognize the ONE IDENTITY represented by the Hermit until one has broken down the false structures of separateness, and united the personal field of sub-consciousness in some measure, at least, with the universal sub-consciousness typified by the High Priestess. Note that North and Below are represented by Keys in the Tarot tableau which stand in relation to Key 9. Key 16 is beneath Key 9, and Key 2 is above Key 9, in the vertical row corresponding to the second stage of spiritual unfoldment. Thus it may be added that alchemical distillation is the agency by which the principle represented by the High Priestess is made manifest in the activity pictured by Key 16.

The seventh stage of the Great Work is SUBLIMATION. It corresponds to the zodiacal sign Libra. Therefore it is connected with the Hebrew letter

Lamed, which has these meanings:

The Faithful Intelligence; the function of Work or Action; the direction North-West; Tarot Key 11, JUSTICE.

The strict definition of Sublimation, in chemistry, is the conversion of a solid by heat into vapor, which on cooling becomes solid again without assuming a liquid form. In modern psychology the same term is used to denote diversion of undesirable natural trends or impulses, by education or conscious effort, into some more desirable type of behavior or activity.

The alchemical term closely approximates the general sense of the modern psychological use, though retaining something of the chemical significance. Included in the alchemical meaning is also something of the now obsolete sense – "to elevate, to exalt."

In the *Book of Formation* we read: "The twenty-second path is called the Faithful Intelligence, because by it the powers of the Life-Breath are caused to multiply, and all dwellers on earth are merely under its shadow."

To be under the shadow of the Faithful Intelligence is to be bound by Karma, to be enslaved by the series of causes and effects. Yet when the text says that all "dwellers on earth" are in this situation, it does not mean what the words convey to a casual reader. There are two kinds of people in this world. By far the greater number do "dwell on earth." Their consciousness is limited to physical conditions, their judgment is based

upon physical sensation, their expectations are determined by past experiences. On the other hand, in every generation there have been a few, and in this age their number increases rapidly, who know that they live in "heaven" as well as on the earth. These few realize that the I AM at the heart of human personality is the Controlling Center of the world of causes, and not merely one of the phenomena of the world of effects.

They have absolute faith in the perfect law, and that faith is the Faithful Intelligence we are explaining. Today the knowledge is general that the various activities of nature are expressions of law. Most persons understand that even what seem to be accidents are really links in a chain of cause and effect. The marvels of this age of invention are based upon scientific recognition of the reign of law. Yet thousands fail to perceive the truth that the same reign of law governs the transformations of the Life-Breath within the field of human personality. Not the slightest film of fancy is without its definite cause. Not the least permanent of our modes of consciousness but has its place in the series of transformations constituting our mental life.

When some people hear this doctrine that the inner life is as much an expression of law as are the changes of man's environment, their first reaction is a terrified feeling that man is a mere puppet, in the grip of forces beyond his control.

Occult science assures us that there are no grounds for this fear. Every activity of *personality* is certainly a

mathematical consequence of pre-existing causes. But in man there is something higher than personality, something above the series of causes and effects. This is the I AM, the Controlling Center mentioned in an earlier paragraph.

The purpose of practical occultism is to teach the student how to become consciously aware of his identity with this One Law-maker. Thus he is released from the vicious circle of cause and consequence which the Orientals call Karma.

Yet even this release is a matter of law. The consciousness of the released adept cannot find expression through the organism of an unripe personality. The "green apples" on the Tree of Life are ripened by processes which are included in the reign of law. Even when the maturing process is hastened by occult practice, laws must be known and obeyed.

The faith of the occultist, then, is primarily faith in law. To build it up, the perception of the working of cause and effect in the inner life of man must be established, and it can be established by practice only. It takes just as much practice to think an unfamiliar thought as it does to perform an unfamiliar action.

Thinking, indeed, is really just as much bodily action as any other kind of work. The special kind of thinking which alchemists call Sublimation is actual physical labor, even if it does begin in our minds. This practice is facilitated by looking at Key 11, because the symbols of

that design have been arranged so that they impress upon the sub-consciousness of the observer certain seed-ideas which ultimately develop into active faith. You may have little faith now, but you will build faith if you use Key 11.

You will thus come to realize that your life is by no means that of a puppet. You will know, because you will have identified yourself with the Controlling Cause, that inner essence of perfect freedom, that for you the reign of law is no chain, binding you to the working out, on the "eye for eye" principle, of all your past mistakes.

Make no mistake. The "eye for eye" manifestation of the law is the one that is operative in the lives of the greater number of human beings. Nor does anyone escape from it by simply asserting that he is not affected by its operation. Neither can anyone find release from it by leaning on some supposedly higher personality. We have to pay every jot and tittle of our cosmic debts. Nothing is forgiven, for the law is perfect. But the "eye for eye" manifestation is not the highest manifestation of the law. Though we have to pay our debts, we can pay in another way, by bringing to bear a higher aspect of the law.

Just as men, chained to earth for milleniums by the law of gravitation, now fly faster than any bird by utilizing another aspect of the same law, so does the practical occultist pay his Karmic debts in another, more valuable kind of cosmic currency. For his work gives him access to that treasure of treasures which enables him to strike

the balance without pain.

This is what is accomplished in alchemical sublimation, which exalts Saturn, the alchemical lead, by the aid of Venus. For Venus rules, and Saturn is exalted in, Libra. The element involved in the work is Air, and this without symbol of metaphor. Breath-control is essential to the work of Sublimation.

This breath-control is not any dangerous practice, such as some that have been widely advocated. It is simply balanced, rhythmic breathing. A full, deep breath, followed by a period of retention, and then a slow, complete exhalation. Count four for inhalation, four for retention, and four for exhalation when you begin your practice. After awhile you may increase the count gradually, until you can make it ten, at the same tempo, for each part of a complete breath cycle. But go slow, and be sure not to subject yourself to strain. Watch the breathing, as you do this practice, to see that it is easy, regular, and noiseless. Do not practice over ten minutes at a time, and not more than three times daily. The best times are on rising, at noon, and at sunset. If it is difficult to observe the sunset hour, make your third practice on retiring.

Key 11 gives us a strong hint that Sublimation includes elimination. This is also suggested by the fact that Libra rules the kidneys, organs of elimination which maintain the chemical balance of the blood. The hint in the picture is the uplifted sword in the woman's right hand.

The psychological part of the process of sublimation consists in eliminating from our mental pictures of future activity every detail which we do not wish to see realized. This requires discrimination and imagination. It also requires *definition*, a phase of limitation, and limitation is the quality associated with Saturn. Thus you will notice that the handle of the sword is shaped like a T, and this letter corresponds to Saturn, because it is the Roman character derived from the Hebrew letter Tav, to which Saturn is attributed.

This elimination is by no means a negative process. It demands concentration on mental images (ruled by Venus) of the desired forms of manifestation. Concentration itself is a kind of elimination, because it is choice of a particular object. Thus in the mental work of sublimation we select a desirable form of personal activity as our goal, and then cut out everything which does not contribute in some way to that objective.

We cut away the weeds of fear, of doubt, of indecision, by engaging in types of action that nourish courage, confidence, and decision. Remember always, the modifications of the mind are to be overcome by their opposites. Active imagery, and clear verbal statement of the conditions one seeks to bring into manifestation, will eventually divert the energy formerly expressed in negative imagery and negative statement into these more desirable positive channels.

We eliminate whatever wastes power. Hence we cut out useless discussion of our hopes and aims with persons

who are not actually interested. We avoid argument on controversial topics, because we know that argument never settles any controversy. In a word, we avoid whatever diverts us from the path leading to our goal.

Does this mean that we have no amusement, no relaxation? Does it mean that we must always have our work on our minds? Certainly not. As Eliphaz says, "The way to see is not to be always looking." But we must choose amusements that really refresh us. While we are engaged in them, moreover, we must wield the sword lustily to cut off thoughts of work or business which interfere with complete rest and relaxation.

All this may seem to be somewhat remote from ordinary conceptions of the alchemical process. The contrary is the truth. Such practical details as are give in the preceding paragraphs are by no means the whole of alchemical sublimation, but they are an indispensable part, and they come first.

For this work actually converts solids in the bloodstream into a vapor, through the functioning of the brain-cells involved in the work. And then the vapor condenses itself again as a solid – AS THE SOLID CONDITIONS OF EXTERNAL CIRCUM-STANCE. Here, in a phrase, is what really occurs. It is by no means "common" sense. It is nevertheless literal truth. One of the functions of the human brain is to make matrices for external conditions. The matrices are mental images. The energy expressed in creative imagination is real energy, derived from subtle, but

relatively solid, substances in the blood-stream. That energy is projected in thinking creatively, and ultimately it condenses, or is precipitated or solidified, in the actual forms that are imaged. Adepts at this can precipitate their mental images with great speed, and the results appear to be miracles. Beginners do not get their results so quickly, but as they gain skill, the work can be done more rapidly.

The eighth stage of the Great Work is PUTREFACTION. It corresponds to the zodiacal sign Scorpio, and to the letter Nun, which has the following attributions:

The Imaginative Intelligence; the direction South-West; the function of Locomotion; Tarot Key 13, DEATH.

Putrefaction is decomposition, the disintegration of a body into its elementary parts. Ripley tells us that without Putrefaction no seed may multiply. He says also: "It must be done only by continual action of moist heat in the body, *not manually*." And in his chapter on Putrefaction there is a long description of the false alchemists, "who work after their fantasy, in many subjects in which there be gay tinctures, both white and red, divided manually to sight." It would seem that no person acquainted with Ripley, and with his remarks on this point, would be of the opinion that the Great Work is an external chemical process. Yet in very recent times the claim has been advanced that the Red Powder has been made in a physical laboratory.

Now, heat is always associated with fire and the Mars force, and the particular "moist heat" which is operative in the work of Putrefaction is the moist heat of the watery sign Scorpio. This is most important to the whole alchemical undertaking. Ripley says: "Unless your Matter putrefies, it may in no wise be truly altered, nor may your element be divided kindly."

What is indicated here is the disintegration of that which is the real matter of the alchemical operation, that is, the alchemist's own personality. Primarily, the disintegration, of putrefaction, must be internal. This is what Eliphas Levi means when he says that a person who knows how to control the currents of the Astral Light "might throw the world into confusion." The world he speaks of is the microcosm, and its face cannot possibly be transformed until it is first reduced to its elemental chaos.

In Key 16, as we have seen before, we have a picture of the destruction of the microcosmic world. For when the Mars force is re-directed by the alchemical process, it breaks down the conception of personality which is held by the greater number of human beings. A new vision of the meaning of personality flashes like lightning upon us. It utterly disintegrates our former structure of false opinions, and this disintegration is the alchemical putrefaction.

This is the inner meaning of what Jesus taught his disciples: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For

whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

Self-denial does not mean the act of depriving oneself of something one enjoys, like an article of diet, or an amusement. It means the total repudiation of one's ignorant interpretation of self-hood. It is a reversal of the former point-of-view, and in the alchemical connection, it is noteworthy that this reversal is pictured in Tarot by Key 12, corresponding to the element of water. Thus Ripley's "moist heat" is seen to be the stabilizing of the new idea of the meaning of personality by a combination of what is pictured in Keys 16 and 12.

The Greek verb translated "take up" in the foregoing quotations means also, "to keep the mind in suspense." It is a technical mystery-term, as is the word "cross." In the Gospel of St. Luke there is an additional hint, for there we read that one must take up his cross daily. The "cross" is what is pictured in Key 12 as the gallows, and in the Hebrew alphabet it is the letter Tav, attributed to Saturn. To take up the cross is to raise the energy-concentrated in the Saturn center, and this is done by utter repudiation of personal origination for any state of consciousness, for any act of the body, for any word uttered, for any condition of external circumstance.

Ripley tells us that this part of the work takes ninety nights. Note that 90 is the number of the letter-name M I M, Mem, associated with Key 12, and that it is also the number of the letter Tzaddi, representing meditation. He says, too, that the result of putrefaction

is a powder black as a crow's bill. Also that one must come in by the gate of blackness if one seeks to win to the Paradise of Whiteness.

This reference to blackness is an exact description of the result of the work of putrefaction. For when one meditates, and denies himself, and disintegrates the entire notion that anything originates in personality, the outcome is the perception that all things, all actions, all thoughts, all words, are manifestations of ONE THING, which appears to the Intellectual mind as No Thing, or utter darkness. Yet this darkness is really the Limitless Light, and so Boehme calls it *Radiant Darkness*. That Light, moreover, is corpuscular. That is to say, it is actually composed of innumerable tiny points. Hence the work of Putrefaction is said to result in the production of a black *powder*.

The work of Putrefaction is associated with the Imaginative Intelligence, pictured by Key 13 in Tarot. The force directly employed is the nerve-force which is specialized in the Mars center below the navel. Mastery of the currents of this force is gained by mental imagery, but it needs to be said that the images employed have nothing to do with the sex-function. All magic is accomplished by the mind's power of generating mental images. The mental imagery required to deny the old conception of the self, and reduce it to the chaos of the Radiant Darkness, is thus properly represented by the number 13, since that number is the value of the Hebrew noun AChD, *Achad*, Unity.

This self-denial is the loss of the old life, that the new life may be found. It is the death of the old man, that the new man may be born. And note that in Key 13 the reaper is a skeleton, and that in astrology Saturn rules the skeleton. Thus it will be evident that the active principle in Putrefaction is the Saturn force, corresponding to the letter Tav and the cross.

But have we not just said that the Mars force is active in this work? Yes, but the Mars force cannot be lifted up unless it is stirred into activity by an impulse originating in the Saturn center at the base of the spine. When the coiled-up Kundalini, as the yogis call it, is released by right concentration and meditation, it rises upward, and, so to say, impels the Mars force upward, too. Mars cannot become active unless stirred into motion by Saturn. Thus in Key 13 a skeleton, symbolizing Saturn, is the reaper, but the scythe which does the actual reaping has a blade of steel, the metal of Mars. And to emphasize this, the handle of the scythe, which gives the necessary impetus to make the blade cut, is shaped like a letter T, or Tav.

The letter Nun is properly assigned to the direction South-West. (In some of our earlier lessons, and in the *Analysis of the Tarot*, the direction assigned to Nun is North-West, and that given to Libra is South-West. This, however, is an error, due to our transcription of a "blind" to be found in several versions of the *Book of Formation*. Knut Stenring gives the correct arrangement for these two letters, and we have received recently additional light on the matter which confirms his

findings.) South corresponds to the letter Resh, the Sun, and Key 19. West corresponds to the letter Kaph, Jupiter, and Key 10. The bodily centers involved are the Sun center at the heart and the Jupiter center, or solar plexus. In Putrefaction, these centers are indirectly affected by the work of self-denial and taking up the cross daily. Psychologically, too, alchemical Putrefaction involves a combination of the ideas symbolized by Keys 19 and 10. For when the old false conception of personality is repudiated, the new and true one, symbolized by Key 19 is automatically developed as a consequence. This new conception is an elaboration of the idea typified by Key 10, which idea may be put into the following words: Any particular event is really a manifestation of the cyclic transformation or rotation of the One Thing through the various phases of its self-expression. Every event is like a point on the circumference of a circle, or like a point on the rim of a turning wheel. It is continuous with all preceding events, and continuous with all succeeding events. For there is no break anywhere in the continuity of the Life-power's self-manifestation. As the *Fama Fraternitatis* puts it, "Nowhere a vacuum." The conception of *empty* space is a fallacy, a misinterpretation of appearances. All space is full of the presence of the ONE THING. Thus, since every particular event is continuous with all other events, such an event as the performance of a given action by a human body, or the utterance of a word, or the formation of a mental image, is really a particular expression of the power of the ONE THING at that particular time and place.

Clear perception that this is true destroys all sense of personal separateness. Hence the lightning-flash of Key 16 and the turning wheel of Key 10 are two symbols for one reality, and a third symbol for the same reality is the skeleton reaper of Key 13. Note that the numbers of these three Keys are related. The sum of the numbers from 0 to 10 is $55 = 5 + 5 = 10 = 1 + 0 = 1$. The sum of the numbers from 0 to 13 is $91 = 9 + 1 = 10 = 1 + 0 = 1$. The sum of the numbers from 0 to 16 is $136 = 1 + 3 + 6 = 10 = 1 + 0 = 1$. In fact all numbers in the series 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, and 19 are aspects of the number 1, and thus the Tarot Keys bearing these numbers all represent a single reality under various aspects. The key to them all is the Key numbered 1, The Magician, which stands for the Intelligence of Transparency – for the idea that all personal activity whatsoever is the result of the working of a super-conscious Life-power, through the functioning of a conscious instrument, whence its activity passes into the sub-conscious level, from which it ascends again to the super-conscious, returning on its upward journey *through self-consciousness* again.

Putrefaction is therefore the loss of the false interpretation of life, and this loss is absolutely necessary in order that the true interpretation may be found. What is lost is false, is a counterfeit, is the cause of all our miseries. By utterly destroying this error the truth becomes evident. We exchange our limited, and really non-existent, personal powers for the limitless, and truly existent, Life-power of the ONE IDENTITY.

All the while, remember, the power at work in all our

thinking, speech, and action has been the one Life-power. We do not change the reality in the least by our change of consciousness. We do not make anything so which was not so before. But we know the truth of the matter, and the truth makes us free.

It is because of this that Ripley speaks of Putrefaction as being "the rotting of gold." Gold, as we have seen elsewhere, is in spiritual alchemy a symbol of absolute truth. Furthermore, though the alchemists declare that the First Matter is Water, and call it by all manner of names, they agree, too, that the thing the alchemist must work upon is gold, or the alchemical Sun, pictured in Key 19.

Thus it follows that the substance which is reduced to black powder by Putrefaction is none other than gold. Physically this is true, as well as metaphysically, for what the alchemist works upon is the material of his own flesh-and-blood body, together with its finer etheric and astral counterparts. By setting up a new conception of personality, as the transparent vehicle of the One Reality, he actually changes the chemical and molecular structure of the physical vehicle. And that physical vehicle is really made out of the radiant energy of the physical sun. Even when we are mistaken about personality, and our errors result in a poisoned and pain-wracked physical body, the fundamental substance of that body is nevertheless the alchemical gold, or universal radiant energy. The pain, misery and limitation we experience are due to the forms, or appearances, taken by this universal radiance under the influence of

mental imagery. When the images are changed, the forms change, too.

Yes, it is as simple as that. Simple to say, and easy to grasp intellectually. Harder to do, at first, though practice makes it easier and easier, until it becomes second nature. The whole work of Putrefaction can be summed up in Jesus' admonition: "Let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

Every day the work must be done. Every day the "cross" of the Saturn force must be lifted up. Every day, until the process becomes automatic, so that no trace of the former interpretation dims the transparency of the regenerated self-consciousness, one must deny the appearances of separate personal origination for any activity whatsoever. Here, in brief, is the practical method of Patanjali, of Buddha, of Jesus, of all the alchemists and of all Masters of Compassion. They who go this way reach the same goal that was reached by the Great Companions whose names have come down to us as the Illuminators, Regenerators and Saviors of humanity. This was their Way, whereby they set themselves free from illusion. It must become your Way, if you would share their freedom.

