

Essential Al-Kemi

by James Rædan, Chapel Hill, 1997
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"But that the secret might not be lost, but rather continued and preserved to posterity they expounded it most faithfully, both in their writings and in oral teaching to their faithful disciples, for the benefit of posterity; nevertheless, they so clothed and concealed the truth in allegorical language that even now only very few are able to understand their instruction and turn it to practical account. For this practice they had a very good reason; they want to force those who seek this wisdom to feel their dependence upon God (in whose hand are all things), to obtain it through instant prayer, and when it has been revealed to them, to give all the glory to Him. Moreover they did not wish pearls to be cast before swine." -
The Sophic Hydrolith

In these two sentences, four essential points of alchemic praxis have been enumerated for us by the anonymous author of the *Sophic Hydrolith* (or, "Waterstone of the Wise"); and so it but remains for us to indicate a functional way of understanding these points and their terms:

1. *Dependence upon and Submission unto God;*
2. *Necessity and Utility of Prayer;*
3. *Non-possession or Sacrifice of Glory;*
4. *Discernment in Transmission – casting Pearls*

Let us take each of these points and their terms in order.

I. Dependence upon and Submission unto God

Term 1: *Dependence* implies being attached or subordinate to, hanging from, or contingent upon, something else.

That upon which we depend is essential to us and there is both an element of intense desire and of utmost necessity in such dependence. The antithesis of dependence upon God may be held to be independence from God.

Antithesis: *Independence* implies being cut off from that essential something; self-subsistence and/or self-maintenance.

The state of independence can be readily seen to be illusory as mankind does not possess the ability to create or sustain life, only the power to re-combine and maintain within very definite limits.

Nicolas Flammel, the noted French Alchemical adept, has written regarding our dependence upon God and the practical retardation of progress attendant upon an assumption of independence from our Source:

" . . . if metals be separated from their mine, then they, like the fruit of trees too

soon gathered, never come to their perfection . . ."

Within circles of essential alchemy, little emphasis is placed upon belief. Belief and belief systems are viewed as theoretical launching points to the realm of identic experience. There is, nevertheless, one belief universally held to be requisite to a successful practice: ***There is a Divine Essence.***

Term 2: *Submission* implies acknowledgement of dependence, humility, supplication, meekness, resignation, love, and reverence.

That to which we submit is precisely that upon which we depend. Submission, then, may be seen as the act or process of returning to, communing with, and acting in conformity to that Source upon which we depend. The antithesis of submission to God may be held to be rebellion against God.

Antithesis: *Rebellion*, then, may be discovered to be active resistance, opposition, or contentiousness; the condition of being an opposing principle, force, or factor.

Jacob Boehme has indicated the defect of rebellion and the most practical and efficacious method of progress in alchemical practice: willing submission of ones life and self to that which is greater than that life and self:

"Son, when thou canst throw thyself into THAT, where no creature [including oneself] dwelleth, though it be but for a moment, then thou hearest what God speaketh . . . Blessed art thou therefore if thou canst stand still from self-thinking and self-willing, and canst stop the wheel of thy imagination and senses . . . then art thou come into the super-imaginariness, and into the Noetic life, which is a state of living above images, figures and shadows."

Within circles of essential alchemy, much emphasis is placed upon practical methods. Such methods are viewed as skillful and expedient means. There is one commandment universally held to reflect the basis of this method: ***Thou shalt not disfigure the soul.***

Term 3: *God*

This going out from and returning into God is the sum total of alchemystical theory and practice, and the recognition of the reality of this circular passage from source to solution is taken for granted by the adepts of the alchemical tradition.

However, even as with the nature of the human being, where a subtle distinction is made between identity and essence, so too there is a subtle distinction made between the Person of God and the Essence of God, as between the Relative and the Absolute. It is to the relative specific identity of God that we ascribe qualities; while to the Absolute Essence of God no qualities can be ascribed. *Jean D'Espagnet*, in the first line of his *Enchyridion Physicae Restitutae*, indicates this distinction:

"God is an Eternal Being, an infinite Oneness, the radical principle of all things whose Essence is an incomprehensible Light; His Power: Omnipotence; whose beck is an absolute act. He that dives deeper, is swallowed up in a trance and silence, and is lost in the abyss of unfathomed glory."

It is –despite common opinion to the contrary- the defining characteristic of alchemists that they are eminently practical. The absolute Essence of God is not available for perception or conception and therefore is not to be made a matter of open (frivolous) discussion or meditation (La. *meditatio* – discursive inquiry into the nature of things). However the relative Being of God and the qualities, attributes, and names ascribed to Him in relation to His creatures, being the more apparent, are expediently employed as a means to an end. There is therefore a functional distinction made between the concept and reality of a personal Lord (God as known through His qualities in relation to His creatures) and the absolute Godhead.

The arguments generally adduced by theologians in proof of both the absolute essence and relative identity of God are:

A priori: that which comes before something else; a thing's dependent existence known in relation to its cause. *A priori* knowledge of a thing, then, is knowledge of the causal relationship between a cause and that which depends there-from.

The faculty used to arrive at *a priori* knowledge of the existence of God is the greater reason of the human essence - that is to say, Intellect or Spirit (Gr. *Nous*) - turned away from the sensible toward the intelligible, from phenomenon to noumenon, in order to facilitate effective contemplation of the root or radix of all things; gradually leading from 'contemplation of' to 'union with' the source of all Life.

A posteriori: being that which came after something else; a things cause known in relation to its dependent existence. *A posteriori* knowledge of a thing, then, is a logical procession from the facts of experience to the cause thereof.

The faculty used to arrive at *a posteriori* knowledge of the existence of God is the lesser reason of the specific human identity - that is to say, logic or reason (so-called) - turned toward the sensible world in order to facilitate effective meditation on the qualities of, and the relationship between: God, nature, and man; gradually leading from 'meditation on', to 'contemplation of' the source and solution of life.

Sir Francis Bacon provided an analogy which has occasionally been employed to illustrate the dangers inherent in miscomprehension and improper employment of these approaches and faculties. Paraphrased and re-interpreted it might be rendered thus:

The Ant experiments by haphazardly collecting and using materials, which method indicates the all-too-human tendency to use materials without clearly understanding them.

The Spider neither experiments nor collects but produces webs from its own substance, which method indicates the tendency to formulate hypotheses based upon subjective bias, opinion, and conditioning leading to the confusion of subjective ideas and beliefs with direct perception of truth.

The Bee gathers both the nectar and pollen of many flowers and, little by little, transforms this nectar into honey through individual and collective effort and inherent nature. The product of this labor is then used to feed itself, the community, and the world at large. This method indicates an approach which uses both experimentation and observation (*a posteriori*); as well as using direct

interior penetration (*a priori*) in such a way as to eliminate the abuse of either, or the confusion of the one for the other. Assistance and guidance throughout the process is provided by a community of expert practitioners; the end of which is the transformation of the self and society in the service of all Life and the Source of life.

The lesson is that we must defend ourselves (and others) from the assumption that what we believe to be true is true simply because we so wish it to be. That is to say, we must take exception to the confusion of opinion and fact, bias and truth, the substitution of belief for identic experience. To take such exception is a solidly hermetic trait, for the alchemical Magnum Opus consists in a gradual movement from representation to presentation, from the model to the thing itself, from the apparent to the real.

Paracelsus has indicated that we should:

"...learn from Alchemy, which is otherwise called Spagyria (i.e. separative activity). This teaches you to discern between the true and the false. Such a light of Nature is it that it is a mode of proof in all things, and walks in light. From this light of Nature we ought to know and speak, not from mere phantasy, whence nothing is begotten save the four humours and their compounds, augmentation, stagnation and decrease, with other trifles of this kind. These proceed not from the clear intellect (Gr. Nous), that full treasure house of a good man, but rather are based on a fictitious and insecure foundation."

Therefore - with regard to this text, the hermetic/alchemic corpus, and literature generally - one is well-advised to abide by the words of Sir Francis Bacon:

"Read not to contradict and refute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider."

We are also well advised to heed these words of Roger Bacon:

"There are two modes of knowing: through argument and experience. Argument brings conclusions and compels us to concede them, but does not cause certainty nor remove doubt in order that the mind may remain at rest in truth, unless this is provided by experience."

Sir Francis Bacon's description of the four idols -or basic impediments to the acquisition of human knowledge- is also very instructive. Paraphrased and re-interpreted these idols and their objects might be rendered thus:

Idols of the Tribe represent inherent bias acquired through the fact of being human and having to use human faculties to perceive and conceive truth;

Idols of the Cave represent personal bias acquired through the process of our own subjective experience of life;

Idols of the Marketplace represent inherent bias in the language we must use to convey meaning and our errors in the use thereof;

Idols of the Theater represent inherent bias in the pre-given systems we inherit

regarding what can be known, how it can be known, and the value of such knowing.

All of the foregoing leads one to the conclusion that knowledge of the creation and one's self, may become –with the awakening of conscience– knowledge of one's Lord and His will - gradually leading from 'conditioned reaction', to 'creative action' based upon conation, discernment, and submission.

The internal observation of inherent conscience at work testifies to the fact that "*Verily there is a reward (literally 'fruit') for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth*" - Psalm 58:11. However, we must be certain to distinguish between guilt, which can be an after-the-fact effect felt when one has overstepped one's socialisation, and conscience which has two modes: one based upon the result of a *posteriori* meditation, the other based upon the result of a *a priori* contemplation (and identic experience). True conscience derives from Love and this leads to submission to the beloved which, in turn, leads to union, which is true knowledge. Knowledge of the will of God is thus received through the medium of the Intelligence of the heart (Gr. *Nous*; Ar. *al-Aql al-Qalb*) continually inclined thereto. This process may be summarized in the phrase: ***Let thy conscience guide thee to increased necessity.***

II. Necessity and Utility of Prayer

Term 4: *Necessity* implies the state or fact of pressing or urgent need, especially that arising from poverty (spiritual or otherwise); a requisite; something indispensable.

That which is necessary to us is that also that upon which we depend and that to which we must submit. The antithesis of dependence upon God may be held to be independence from God.

Antithesis: *Superfluity* implies the failure to give exclusive precedence to necessity.

The Necessity of prayer refers to the recognition of our ultimate and permanent dependence upon God, and the further recognition of our willful and illusory assumption of independence from 'HIS' sufficiency.

Jean D'Espagnet, in his *Arcanum Hermeticum* indicates the need to 'watch and pray.' These two activities united in this way serve as a selective barrier which may be observed to 'filter out' the superfluous and admit the necessary - the essential:

"Let him that is desirous of this Knowledge, clear his mind from all evil passions (nepsis - 1st step), especially pride, which is an abomination to Heaven, and is as the gate of Hell; let him be frequent in prayer...that the Mind may be able to reason more freely in private (meditatio - 2nd step) and be highly lifted up (contemplatio - 3rd step); for unless it be kindled with a beam of Divine Light, it will not be able to penetrate these hidden mysteries of Truth (unificatio)."

Within circles of essential alchemy, much emphasis is placed upon necessity. A clear distinction is made between necessity and superfluity; between need and want. There being only one thing upon which we absolutely depend, and one thing of which we truly have need, and one thing to which we must eventually submit; this one thing is also our sole necessity, as the *Tabula Smaragdina* (or "Emerald Tablet") of *Hermes* declares:

"That which is above corresponds to that which is below, and that which is below corresponds to that which is above, to accomplish the miracles of the One Thing. And just as all things come from One Essence through the mediation of one Intellect (Gr. Nous), so do all created things originate from this One Thing through adaption."

There is, therefore, one directive universally held to reflect the motion of this method: **Let thine eye be single and thy whole body shall be full of light.**

Term 5: *Utility* implies the quality or state of being useful; profitable, having intrinsic value and/or value in use; functionality.

That which is of greatest utility is that which is most useful and most functional; and that which is 'utilitarian' is that which we employ to attain to the necessary and the good as opposed to the merely superfluous. The antithesis of utility may be held to be futility.

Antithesis: *Futility* implies the quality or state of error (ultimately leading to despair) attendant upon the illusion of independence from that which is necessary and the decision to depend upon that which is superfluous and inutile (non-functional).

The Utility of prayer refers to the recognition of its efficaciousness in opening a channel for communication, benediction, and action flowing from the recognition of our dependence upon God's sufficiency, and our submission to 'HIS' will.

Jean D'Espagnet, in his *Arcanum Hermeticum*, indicates the utility of prayer in the following words:

"The Philosophical sublimation of mercury (the Soul 's transcendence of the limits of 'self' or 'form') is completed in two things; namely by removing things superfluous (*nepsis*: to watch), and by introducing things wanting (*meditatio* and *contemplatio*: to pray): the superfluities are the external accidents . . . Add hereunto the sulphur of nature (lesser conscience of the specific human identity), whose grain (seed and substance) and leaven (principle of corruption and growth) it hath in itself, so much as sufficeth it (for the living of a worldly life); but see that it be sufficient for other things also (for the living of a life in conformity with the Divine Will). Multiply therefore that invisible Sulphur of the philosophers (Instant or 'Spontaneous' Prayer of the Heart; True Conscience as submission to Divine Will) until the virgin's milk come forth (benediction/grace/inspiration - the nourishment necessary to the growth of subtle spiritual qualities): and so the first gate is opened unto thee."

Within circles of essential alchemy, much emphasis is placed upon utility. A clear distinction is made between the non-functional and the functional, as between the fruitless and the fruitful; as also between two types of leaven. The first leaven is that which is related to the life of the world. It is not so much 'evil' as it is limited and limiting. If we understand 'evil' to indicate the existence of a 'veil' over one's heart, then prayer is the method of purifying, unveiling, or 'circumcising' the heart. The distinction between the common idea of 'evil' and that of 'veil' relates directly to the distinction between the common idea of 'sin' and that of *hamartia* - 'missing the mark'. The worldly or lesser leaven brings only a partial corruption or dissolution of the superfluous and futile and this

permits a 'puffing-up' or 'inflation' of the self. The true or divine leaven, however, brings a complete corruption or dissolution of the worldly life and personal will followed by an influx of the Universal Life and Divine Will. This Divine leaven permits the putrefaction of the matter (in the first or black work - *nigredo*), and it is held to permit and promote the fruitfulness of alchemistical practice. This Divine leaven can be summarized thus: ***Not my will but thine be done.***

Term 6: *Prayer* implies turning around from the sensory to the intelligible, from the without to the within, and from representation to presentation.

Prayer is that which establishes in us the realization and embodiment of our *Nexus Indivulsus* (or 'indissoluble union') with the Divine Essence even as it empties the senses, affections, and imagination of lesser objects and goals. It is a redirection and circulation of the light of one's spiritual intelligence (Gr. *Nous*; Ar. *al-Aql*). It can be referred to as a *metanoia* or 'change of heart' - a reversal of flow.

Plato tells us:

"Prayer is the ardent turning of the soul toward God; not to ask any particular good, but for good itself -- for the Universal Supreme Good. We often mistake what is pernicious and dangerous for what is useful and desirable. Therefore remain silent in the presence of the divine, till the clouds are removed from thy eyes, and enable thee to see by the light which issues from the Divine, not what appears as good to thee, but what is really Good."

Iamblichus relates:

"The continual exercise of prayer nourishes the vigour of our intellect and renders the receptacles of the soul far more capacious for the communications of divine qualities. It is likewise the Divine key, which opens to men the spiritual penetralia and accustoms us to the splendid rivers of supernal light. In a short time it perfects our inmost recesses, and disposes them for the ineffable contact and embrace of Divine qualities, and does not desist until it raises us to the summit of all."

As *Plato* and *Iamblichus* make clear, prayer is not a petition for personal gain (superfluity), but rather the spontaneous expression of inherent human modalities (necessity, dependence, submission). Prayer is a channel of revelation and benediction.

The Prophet (PBUH) has said: *"There shall be no compulsion in matters of religion."* One may discover that the reason for this is that the relative specific identity of God is different for each person. Each lover must enjoy perfect freedom wherein to acknowledge the superiority of his Beloved to all others in relation to him, while likewise acknowledging the right of every other lover to do the same. Each relative specific identity of God (or Personal Lord) is but an expression through constriction of God's Singular and Absolute Essence, and therefore religion (as devotion to one's Lord) cannot be made a matter of contention or compulsion or even compromise between lovers.

As indicated previously, there may be said to be four steps in prayer:

1. The first step is 'to watch' (*nepsis*). In this step we stand guard over our sensory,

cognitive, and affective systems so as to permit ourselves to 'enter into our closet' as we have been instructed by scripture.

2. The second step is 'to know and give thanks' (*meditatio*). In this step we meditate on the things that are - their relations, and dependencies - and give thanks to the source of all.
3. The third step is to 'lift up' or be 'lifted up' (*contemplatio*). In this step we contemplate God by infusing the intellect into the heart and inviting our personal Lord to dwell therein. This step has several degrees (acquired, steady, and unified).
4. The fourth step is to permit one's Lord to introduce one to the totality of Divine qualities (*unificatio/apotheosis*). This step is entirely dependent upon 'grace' and the full embodiment of 'watching' as a primary modality of being.

III. Non-possession or Sacrifice of Glory

Term 7: Non-Possession implies the act or state of neither occupying, holding, nor controlling an object, state, faculty, quality, percept, concept, or end as if it were one's own, and connotes a degree of maturity.

Non-Possession refers to the recognition of dependence upon God. The antithesis of non-possession might be held to be possession.

Antithesis: *Possession* implies the act or state of assuming control, ownership, or occupancy - whether rightfully or wrongfully - of any object, state, faculty, quality, percept, concept, or end.

Non-possession -a state of complete and utter dependence- entails gratitude (chastity), service (obedience), and poverty.

"Jesus said, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come and follow me.' When the young man heard this saying, he went away with a heavy heart, for he was a man of many and great possessions." - Matt. xix: 22

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God" - Luke vi: 20

Jean D'Espagnet, in the first and second points of his '*Arcanum*', has given both the exoteric (preparatory) and esoteric (laboratory) versions of the above injunctions:

"1. The beginning of this Divine Science is the fear of the Lord and its end is charity and love toward our Neighbour; the all-satisfying Golden Crop is properly devoted to the rearing and endowing of temples and hospices; for whatsoever the Almighty freely bestoweth on us, we should properly offer again to HIM. As also Countries grievously oppressed may be set free; prisoners unduly held captive may be released, and souls almost starved may be relieved.

2. The light of this knowledge is the gift of God, which by His will He bestoweth upon whom He pleaseth. Let none therefore set himself to the study hereof, until

having cleared and purified his heart, he devote himself wholly unto God, and be emptied of all affection and desire unto impure things."

Within circles of essential alchemy, a great deal of emphasis is placed upon non-possession through cleansing the senses and purging the affections and imagination. There is, after all, only one thing that must increase while all other things decrease, and this may be summarized as follows: **He is glorified, the more 'I' am mortified.**

Term 8: *Sacrifice* implies the act of making sacred - consecration - or the state of being so made; an offering or anything laid upon an altar; the surrender of anything; the devotion of some desirable object, state, quality, or function in behalf of a higher object, state, quality or function or to a claim deemed more pressing.

"The priest is completely holy, down to his very body. For, if he has taken the bread, will he not consecrate it; or the cup or anything else that he acquires, will he not consecrate it. Then how will he not consecrate the body also?" - Gospel of Philip

Antithesis: *Indulgence* implies foolish or senseless behavior expressed as an inability to resist the gratification of whims and desires; a disposition to yield to subjective bias, prejudice, or predilection; the act and fact of gratifying a whim, or the unwillingness to relinquish a 'possession' (whether material, psychological, or spiritual) for a higher good (even that Universal Good previously mentioned by Plato).

The term 'Sacrifice' refers to the movement of the soul toward submission, even to the sacrifice of personal identity. This sacrifice is mentioned by Mary Anne Atwood as essential to alchemystical practice:

"All the false sulphurs (by sulphurs I mean forms) of the mundane life require to be purified, nay, perhaps extirpated, in order that the medium for manifestation of the Divine Light be simple and pure. The human spirit has to die to everything that it now lives to, and lastly to its own identity, in order to become a simple receptacle and magnet for the Divine Seed . . . All true religion in this life is a preparation of the Will for this final work."

The alchemy of Essence entails what at first seems to be great sacrifice. Yet, as we engage this process of sacrifice we find that we forfeit the lesser and the gross and gain the greater and the subtle. While such gains are very real we are warned not to pursue the alchemic art for the purpose of gains however refined. *Rabi'a al-Adawiyya* emphasized this:

*"O my God! If I worship Thee
on account of the fear of Hell,
burn me in Hell;
and if I worship Thee
with the hope of Paradise,
exclude me from it;
but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake,
then withhold not from me
Thine Eternal Beauty."*

The insistence upon sacrifice as a means to cleanse the senses and purge the affections is repeatedly mentioned in alchemical texts. As we proceed and progress, we gradually come to realize that, in fact, we have been asked to sacrifice nothing at all: **To fortify the essential, forfeit the superfluous.**

Term 9: *Glory* implies praise, honor, admiration, or distinction accorded by common consent to a person or thing; high reputation; fame; renown; an object of pride or boast; the occasion of praise. It has also the following significances: the presence of the Divine Essence; the manifestations of the Divine Nature and favor; celestial honor; heaven.

"God dwells in that which will resign itself up, with all its reason and skill, unto Him . . . I have prayed strongly that I might not write except for the Glory of God and the instruction and benefit of my brethren." – **Jacob Boehme**

"It is proper to glorify the Self-Subsistent Presence and no other. It is right to laud and magnify the Lord of Divine Might exceedingly. Praise be to the Holy One from whose identity proceeds the identity of all that can be named, and from whose being comes the being of all that will ever be. Homage and benedictions upon the Soul of our Lord, the ray of whose light of purity shone upon the world and whose beams of revelation lit the horizons of the orient and occident, and upon his Companions and Helpers." - **Surahwardi**

Being that all we are comes from The 'Self-Subsistent Presence', how can we possibly seek or claim any Glory for ourselves? Glory belongs to God alone. Yet, we often assume that the good we do and the virtue we display are to our credit. This assumption leads, for those undergoing spiritual discipline, to a sort of 'addiction' to humility, austerity, service, etc., as ends in themselves which in turn leads to their transformation from effective spiritual fulcrums to empty pious displays – disguised vanity. These three things, each of which are designed and ordained to loosen the bonds of our slavery to the whims and dictates of the self-infatuated psychological consciousness can, through misappropriation of Glory, end up reinforcing those very chains of bondage - turning medicine and mercy into poison and wrath.

"First, there should be the invocation of God, flowing from the depth of a pure and sincere heart, and a conscience which should be free from all ambition, hypocrisy, and vice, as also from all cognate faults, such as arrogance, boldness, pride, luxury, worldly vanity, oppression of the poor, and similar iniquities, which should all be rooted up out of the heart -- that when a man appears before the Throne of Grace, to regain the health of his body, he may come with a conscience weeded of all tares, and be changed into a pure temple of God: cleansed of all that defiles." - **Basil Valentine**

When it is said in the texts that Glory should be given to God, what is not meant is that God somehow 'needs' or 'wants' praise. What is meant is that Glory *is* God's and though we vainly attempt to appropriate it for ourselves and arrogate it to ourselves, we cannot truly possess it. Therefore, it is not only fitting to render all Glory to its source, but it is ultimately beneficial for us to do so.

"Saturn or the self-willed life can only be overcome by the process of satiation; he must be given from without plenty "of the honey of the bees," the aurific (golden) seed, the Rational Light. He first of all entraps the Light, and then longs for more

to feed that centre which he has entrapped, and just as a seed which has drawn light from the sun longs for more and so grows till it bursts out of the saturnine husk into a flower, and soon no longer grows for itself but for another generation and becomes transmuted; so the selfish Saturnine life in man when once it has passed into its new life, or rather admitted it, assimilates that life into itself and becomes itself transmuted." - Mary Anne Atwood

So when one is advised to give Glory unto God, such is really an invitation to look within and remember that we 'live and breathe and have our being' within and from The Holy One and we should therefore act in accordance with the simple fact of the matter, apart from any emotional, contextual, or other 'personal' considerations. This 'simple fact' is potent to transform our acts of charity, service, and austerity from self-serving and self-glorifying performances to true service in the name [which is to say, in conformity to the Will, Plan, or Design] of The One. ***We come from the One and return to the One, how can we presume to keep anything from the source that was and the end that is?***

IV. Discernment in Transmission – casting Pearls

Term 10: *Discernment* implies the faculty, act, and/or ability to separate or distinguish (La. *discernere*); to test in crisis or to distinguish good and evil (Gr. *diakrisis*); spiritual Insight into the heart or essence of a thing; to see beyond the apparent to the real.

Discernment is that necessary *spagyric* act whereby the alchemist separates the fine from the gross -- which separation is the basis of all Alchemy. The antithesis of discernment may be held to be confusion.

Antithesis: *Confusion* (or lack of discernment) implies inaccurate or misleading perception, conception, and action expressed as an inability, under crisis, to distinguish between the Apparent and the Real.

Confusion may further be seen to be a direct result of the false self-sufficiency (assumed independence) which is typified in alchemic literature by Saturn/Lead (inverted Gold) – the self-willed life.

That primary source-text of European alchemy - the "*Tabula Smaragdina*" - states:

*"Thou shalt separate the earth from the fire,
the subtle from the gross, gently, with much sagacity.
It ascends from earth to heaven, and again descends to earth
and revives the strength of the superiors and of the inferiors.
Thus thou perceivest the glory of the whole world;
henceforth all obscurity [confusion] shall flee before thee."*

An alchemystical adept (or disciple of God) must certainly possess discernment in order to provide for the perpetuation of The Tradition; to prevent pearls from being cast before swine:

"[The] disciple of God if he is a sensible fellow understands what discipleship is all about. The bodily forms will not deceive him: he will look at the condition of the soul of each one and speak with him [accordingly]. There are many animals

in the world which are in human form. When he identifies them, to the swine he will throw acorns, to the cattle he will throw barley and chaff and grass, to the dogs he will throw bones. To the slaves he will give only the elementary lessons, to the children he will give the complete instruction." – **Gospel of Philip**

Knowledge of self and others includes the discernment of purpose within the animal shape.

Term 11: *Transmission* implies the act or process of sending or causing to be sent, a message, by means of a signal from a transmitter; the right possessed by an heir or legatee of bequeathing to his successor or successors any inheritance, legacy, title, right, privilege, or station to which he/she is entitled; the act or process of sending or causing to be sent, a message; that portion of radiant energy that passes through a substance; an incident in which an agent is passed from one organism to another.

"The slave seeks only to be free; he does not hope to acquire the estate of his master. However, the son is not only a son but lays claim to the inheritance of the father. Those who are heirs to the dead are themselves dead, and they inherit the dead. Those who are heirs to what is living are alive, and they are heirs to both the living and the dead. The dead are heirs to nothing. For how can he who is dead inherit?" - **Gospel of Phillip**

Antithesis: *Suppression* implies the concealment, retention, obstruction, or even destruction of a legacy, privilege, bequest, power, faculty, message, or agent.

It is universally held that though The Tradition is one, its transmission is nevertheless varied and context dependent. Transmission of The Tradition therefore depends upon proper diagnosis of the needs of time, place, and people.

"The multiplicity is in outward ceremony, while truth alone is at the interior. The cause for the multiplicity of brotherhoods is in the multiple explanations of symbols and terms according to times, needs, and circumstances. The true community of light can only be one." - **Count Michael Meier**

The Science (theory) and Art (practice) of Alchemy are also universally held to be the prerogative of God: success in the Great Work is ultimately a matter of Grace not Industry, though no-one succeeds in the Magnum Opus without assiduous labor. Therefore, the transmission of this Tradition is not wholly dependent upon human agency despite the fact that the impalpable force generated in the inner laboratory of the human exemplar is the primary agency of projection, transmission, and multiplication.

"When we meet with a metal that is near to perfection, we are thereby excused from many that are far off . . . And without doubt, he that is quick sighted in this my Mirror such that by his own industry he has found out the true matter, he knows full well upon what body the medicine is to be projected to bring it to perfection. For the forerunners of this Art, who have found it out by their philosophy, do point out with their finger the direct and plain way, when they say: Nature contains nature: Nature overcomes nature: and Nature meeting with nature, exceedingly rejoices, and is changed into other natures." - **Roger Bacon**

The Tradition is not transmitted through words – it is a transmission of essence to

essence ... from being to being.

Term 12: *Pearl* implies a precious thing which cannot be cast before swine, for they will fail to recognize its value.

The Pearl (La. *Unio*) is a secret that is embodied and not taught. Though it can be cast, it must likewise be caught. To be 'alone with' the Beloved in the 'bridal chamber' (indicative of intimate knowledge of self and LORD), is the Pearl (or "secret which hides itself").

"Every seeker of his Lord must be alone with himself with his Lord in his inmost consciousness, since God gave man an outward dimension (Ar. zahir) and an inward dimension (Ar. batin) only so that he might be alone with God in his inward dimension, and witness Him in his outward dimension within the secondary causes, after having gazed upon Him in his inward dimension, so that he may discern Him within the midst of the secondary causes. Otherwise, he will never recognize Him. He who enters the spiritual retreat (Ar. khalwa) with God does so only for this reason, since man's inward dimension is the cell of this retreat." - Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi

It is recorded in the *Quran* that God said, "I was a secret treasure and wanted to be known." When we enter into the inward dimension mentioned by Ibn al-Arabi, this retreat cell or closet; we turn the light of our spiritual Intelligence (Ar. *al-Aql*) around to illumine inwardly and become able to discern and follow signs within and without to the signified: God. Like a finger pointing to the moon, we must be careful not to look too closely at the finger lest we miss all the heavenly glory. We must be careful not to become attached to the signs and forget the signified: this would be like keeping the shell while throwing away the pearl. Careful discernment is required:

"What points to Him are His signs; to perceive Him is to affirm Him; to know Him is to profess His Unity; and professing His Unity is to distinguish Him from His creation. The standard for distinguishing is separation in attribute, not separation in terms of distance . . . Whatever can be conceived of is different from Him." - Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi

When you see the creature, you see the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden.