

What Is Alchemy?

by Dennis William Hauck



What is alchemy? Why are the obscure symbols and arcane principles of this ancient craft getting so much attention in modern times? How can the knowledge alchemists discovered and shared have such a strong influence in so many diverse contemporary areas as psychology, spirituality, the arts, literature, business, filmmaking, gaming, and sciences like medicine and quantum physics?

The answer to these questions lies in the universal nature of alchemical practices and operations. Alchemy can be defined most simply as the "art of transformation." It is

concerned with the underlying principles of how things change and the basic process of transforming one thing into another.

The Great Work of alchemy has always been to speed up this natural process of perfection -- to resurrect the ideal of spiritual development and activate the hidden energies that are trapped in matter. Gold in alchemy is a symbol of this hastened perfection from the inner ideal to the outer manifestation. From its origins more than 5,000 years ago in Egypt, alchemy has had a singular focus on the most fundamental principles of change in Nature. Since time immemorial, alchemists have sought to isolate the most basic essences of matter to create higher forms.

Always on the edge between science and religion, alchemy has applied methods from both cultures to work with deeper realities that transcend the words and descriptions people have given them over time. In trying to penetrate the mysteries of matter and energy, the alchemists discovered the very foundations of creation and being that is the common ground of all religions, sciences, philosophies, and psychologies.

The golden thread of alchemy weaves in and out of the tapestry of history, and it is resurfacing today in a wide variety of modern applications:

Spirituality

The most popular reason for studying alchemy today is to reconnect with the fundamental spiritual realities in the universe. In this approach to alchemy, the gold of the alchemist is not the common gold but an inner spiritual gold, and the operations of alchemy are performed in

the inner laboratory of the spirit and soul.

Personal Transformation

The ancient art of alchemy offers viable, powerful methods of changing oneself and living life fully. This use of alchemical principles focuses on the application of simple alchemical techniques and operations on the personal levels of body and mind to perfect one's character and personality. The alchemists called this working with the inner metals or changing one's temperament.



Psychology

Alchemy gave birth to not only chemistry but also modern psychology, and the alchemists were the first to treat psychological problems as chemical imbalances in the body. Alchemical psychology also deals with the clinical treatment of character disorders in the tradition of Dr. Carl Gustav Jung.

Arts & Literature

No matter in which medium an artist works, he or she is trying to transform raw, “dead” matter into something living that speaks to those who experience it. Whether it is the sculptor's block of stone, the painter's canvas, the writer's or musician's empty page, the magic of alchemy is what's behind the artist's impulse to create.

Films & Gaming

Films like “2001,” "The Fifth Element,” “The Matrix,” "Harry Potter," are just a few examples where producers made conscious use of alchemy in the plotline. Many young people are being introduced to alchemical principles in films and software games and want to learn more.

Business

A surprising number of business leaders are applying the principles of alchemy in the fields of finance, human resources, marketing, and research and development. These innovative leaders realize the power of the universal paradigm of alchemy to streamline and energize their company and products as well as grow their business in new ways.

Government

Change is the new theme in government and alchemy offers tested, effective methods of dissolving outmoded structures and building new paradigms. Modern practitioners are working

to dissolve bureaucracy and show government workers how to come alive at work to everyone's benefit.

Traditional Medicine

The physicians' logo (the caduceus) is an ancient symbol of Hermes, the father of alchemy, and alchemists have always provided natural remedies for a wide variety of ailments. They possessed a powerful arsenal of herbs and mineral compounds with detailed knowledge of how they acted in the body, and alchemists were the first to prescribe drugs to cure disease. There is more for modern medicine to learn from alchemy.



Alternative Healing

Most alchemical bodywork modalities like chiropractics, Rolfing, Feldenkrais, bioenergetics, and polarity therapy have their origin in the work of nineteenth century alchemists seeking to isolate the life force. More ancient Oriental alchemical arts like yoga, aikido, tai chi, chi kung, tantra, acupuncture, and reiki have seen a profound increase in Western culture. Most modern holistic disciplines like homeopathy, naturopathy, ayurveda, Chinese medicine, aromatherapy, and reflexology also trace their origin in ancient alchemical teachings

Practical Alchemy

Practical alchemy is concerned with producing tinctures, tonics, oils, compounds, and elixirs that capture healing energy. Unique laboratory work is being undertaken by more and more practitioners around the world.

Science

According to quantum physicist Dr. Fred Wolf, Quantum Physics is the "New Alchemy," and the two disciplines share many fundamental principles including the idea that consciousness is a force in nature. But alchemy has also had a tremendous influence in other sciences such as geology, botany, biology, and of course, chemistry.

Religion

No religious zealot ever tried harder to get closer to God than the medieval alchemists, and a very spiritual form of Christian Alchemy evolved at that time. The most basic task of the alchemist is to center himself within the consciousness of the divine creative presence so that he or she can leap beyond themselves and humbly assist in the work of God, which is the

Great Work of the universe.

Fraternal Organizations

Students and initiates of alchemy and the Hermetic Arts, as well as other practices related to it such the Kabbalah and Tarot, share a long and secret tradition that is still continued in contemporary organizations such as the Freemasons, Golden Dawn, Rosicrucians, Gnostics, mystery schools and many other groups.

Social Alchemy

Alchemy has become a rallying point for a variety of movements driven by the human desire to change adverse conditions and change slavery into freedom, poverty into wealth, fear into courage, war into peace, and totalitarianism into democracy.

Everyday Life

Every one of us participates in alchemy, whether in a conscious manner (through the intentional transformation and manifesting of one's higher nature) or through the tumult and suffering of worldly experiences that finally lead to increased awareness of the alchemical principles at work in the world.
