

Blood From a Stone: Alchemical Processes in the 0=0

by Melissa Seims

The alchemical process is a method for self knowledge that the soul undergoes far outside its realm of existence. Mary Anne Atwood

In The Beginning

The Golden Dawn's Neophyte 0=0 ritual can be viewed as a summary of the candidate's entire work in the outer order. This ritual can be looked at in many ways, but in this article we are going to look at it from the viewpoint of spiritual alchemy. There is a certain amount of disagreement amongst alchemists and alchemical texts about in how many stages and in what order these processes occur. The most popular and earlier versions seem to be based on four stages, commencing with the Nigredo (blackening), followed by the Albedo (whitening), Citrinitas (yellowing) and the final stage, Rubedo (reddening). Whether by accident or design, these seem to be a fitting arrangement for the 0=0 ritual.

Nigredo

The candidate starts off in the Nigredo (melanosis) state, hoodwinked, for the Mother of Darkness has blinded them with her hair and the Father of Darkness has hidden them under his wings. The candidate's soul is in a post-fall state; the stone that has been rejected, the unrefined *prima materia*. As such, the candidate is in a state of putrefaction and in need of earthly purification and consecration to help him or her with the journey through the underworld to a personal realisation of divinity and its individualisation.

The Keryx opens the door to admit the candidate. As holder of the Caduceus, the tool of Hermes, he is the Mercurial force acting on the candidate's unrefined state and is instrumental in the first stage of their personal transmutation.

Alchemically speaking, this stage is about putrefaction, death and decay. In old alchemical texts this phase was often represented by a bird, usually a raven or a crow, descending into darkness. Psychologically speaking, it has been compared to a dark night of the soul, a confrontation with Jung's idea of the shadow self. This process is associated with the transformative planet Saturn and could explain why the neophyte grade is opened utilising knocks in the order given by the planetary square of Saturn if it was laid over the 0=0 temple floor plan.⁽¹⁾



In keeping with the morbid undertones of this stage, decapitation is also associated with it and symbolises the separation of access to ones Higher Self. This helps to explain why, during the taking of the Oath of Silence, which happens immediately after the candidate's initial admittance, they are threatened with decapitation by the Hieres when he lays the Geburic sword against the candidate's Daath centre, located at the back of their neck. This suggests the severance of access to the spiritual realms of Kether, Chokmah and Binah.

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(1) See 'The Battery of Knocks – A personal insight' by Chic Cicero
<http://www.hermeticgoldendawn.org/Documents/Essays/Knocks.htm>

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Following the oath, the candidate is placed in the North, the place of darkness and forgetfulness. The Hierophant speaks on behalf of the candidate and appeals to his undying soul to walk this path of putrefaction with the lamp of hidden knowledge to guide him.

As mentioned earlier, psychologically this state can manifest as depression (the dark night of the soul) and defensiveness and it is not unusual for the candidate to experience these emotions at this point in the ritual. I have seen candidates who have chosen to undergo this experience, physically try to fight off the Keryx's challenges, such is their state of confusion and soul's isolation. Yet, if you can feed the soul's seed which lies waiting to unfurl in the darkness, by daring to look at the issues behind these emotional states, then the albedo stage can commence. Thus the candidate is taken to the throne of the Heireus where they are told that fear is failure, after which they are ushered onwards. It is far too late to go back, they have surrendered themselves to the Golden Dawn system and she is a harsh mistress, who will poke you with the pointy sticks of your own creation.

Albedo


With the removal of the hoodwink the candidate, the wanderer in the darkness of the Nigredo state, is called to the living beauty and gentle light of the Yesodic lunar Goddess, whose lambent glow is caused by her reflection of the blinding Sun. They have symbolically been shown that they need to face their fears and to become aware of their own true nature, to take responsibility for the burgeoning and nurturing of the seed of their soul. The hoodwink is removed and they are taken to the east of the altar, the location of Yesod and the three paths of Shin, Tau and Koph, which together form the rainbow bridge, illuminated by the lunar light that hallmarks the Albedo stage.

The psychologist Carl Jung equated the Albedo (leukosis) stage with the contrasexual soul that is given the name *Anima* for men and *Animus* for women. Jung considered it to be the phase where an insight into one's shadow-side could be achieved; the realisation that one is no longer at the complete mercy of one's own demons.

Images traditionally associated with this stage include Venus/Aphrodite, the white dove or swan, the White Queen and baptism by 'living water' that pours from the womb of creation. This holds the essence of the divinity that is in all of us, but that sometimes takes some literal soul-searching to find. The Albedo stage incorporates the alchemical stage of 'sublimato', referring to the separating out of the soul's essence from the murkier, muddied waters of human fallibility, psychological complexes and mundane existence.



It is the recognition of a soul that has substance but is lacking in the life blood of the later alchemical stage of Rubedo.



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Citrinitas

Sometimes referred to as *xanthosis*, this stage refers to the transmutation of silver into gold, the 'yellowing of the lunar conscientiousness'. It is often represented by an eagle winging its way towards the Sun.



The candidate is now taken to stand between the pillars that symbolise Hod and Netzach. They are facing East, standing on the 27th path of *The Tower*, the tarot key that represents the falling away of earthly illusions. Thus they are now able to glimpse their own Tiphareth consciousness. It is the daybreak of one's soul seed which is now erupting through the earth and reaching for the light, heralding the citrinitas stage. The Hierophant declares that the fourth and final consecration is to take place, after which the candidate is invested with the sash of the neophyte, that aptly symbolises the light dawning in the darkness.

At this point in the ceremony, the Hierophant astrally places the Godform of the candidate's higher self over the top of the new neophyte. Meanwhile the two pillars are psychically overlain with the images of the Goddesses Isis and Nephthys, who stretch forth their wings over the candidate, who is standing between the pillars with arms outstretched to either side in the position of Osiris slain. This is the moment when the body of Osiris is bought to life again, in other words the candidate has risen with their Higher Self connected to them and thus the final circumambulation commences, which reinforces the symbolism of the rising of the solar light in the candidate.

Jung equated this stage with the wise man or wise woman, someone who had accumulated knowledge and awareness of something greater. They are the realised Magician, a wizard of the Gandalf variety who often advises noble souls on quests for holy grails and magic wands.

Rubedo

The final stage is referred to as Rubedo (iosis), the reddening and relates to the blending of the soul with one's Higher Self or Tiphareth consciousness. Some may see this as akin to the idealised concept of Christ consciousness or expect to see it in an Adept. This is misleading, for the maintenance of Tiphareth consciousness whilst in the earthly body can lead to insanity. We reach for the red rose of rubedo, we can even pluck it and share its scent with others, but whilst in Malkuth we still have to live in the body of an ass. Anyone who has experienced this can hold it no better than someone can hold water running through their hands. If anyone tells you otherwise, you should immediately run a mile.

Following the Hierophant and Hieres' exhortations to the Neophyte about the symbols and officers of the temple, after their Sphere of Sensation has been ripped apart, purified, consecrated four times and then reassembled, there is a final point in the ceremony which relates to the Rubedo stage. This is the alchemical change which involves the mixing of the Venus and Mars Fluids.⁽²⁾



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(2) The AO documents featured in 'King Over The Water' by Farrell-Seims, to be published in autumn 2008 by Thoth, refers to the two liquids as the fluids of Venus and Mars.

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Originally the alchemical change involved a ten percent solution of iron perchloride and a one percent solution of potassium sulphocyanide.⁽³⁾ The former was known as the Venus fluid and sometimes the 'elixir of Gold'. It was used as a blood-purifying tonic and a panacea against venereal diseases (diseases of Venus). A solution was also commercially used to etch copper, the metal of Venus.

Potassium sulphocyanide was used to detect iron, the metal of Mars and may help to explain why it was referred to as the Mars fluid. Its addition to the iron perchloride creates a reddening, Rubedo. The redness caused by the interaction between these two chemicals was well known and was employed in photography to impart a red hue to prints. It was also used in nineteenth century theatrical magic where these two clear fluids were dramatically combined to make 'blood' when shock-value was required.

Whilst the mixing of these fluids occur, the candidate is told by the Keryx that within the clear fluid there lie 'elements bearing the semblance of blood, even as within the mind and the brain of the initiate lie concealed the Divine Secrets of the Hidden Knowledge.' The Keryx then reminds the Neophyte how easily this blood, this Hidden Knowledge, can be spilt, the body broken, with a guaranteed trip back to square one. This echoes and reinforces the Oath of Silence and warns the candidate that they contain the seed of their own destruction and if they fail or abandon the process, access to the spiritual realms and their own Higher Self could be removed.

This stage is also practical. The candidate is given a visual symbol that from two clear fluids 'blood' is created. It is subliminally suggesting that their own blood, or life force, can be transformed by the Great Work. This symbol is built into their sphere of sensation and assists in its own realisation over time.

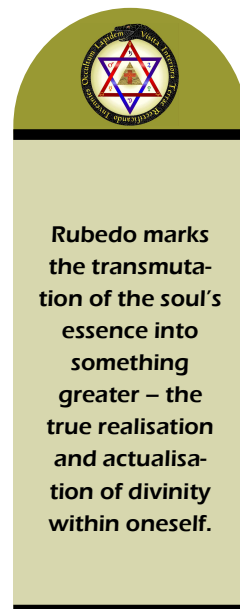


The mixing of the fire of Mars with the passion of Venus marks the creation of something new. It is the consummation, the conjunctio of the Venusian White Queen with the fire of the Red King. It marks the transmutation of the soul's essence into something greater – the true realisation and actualisation of divinity within oneself. More than one European Magical Order used similar ideas based on polarity, to test the Stone at the Rubedo stage.

Jung equated this stage with the union of one's anima and animus and the creation of wholeness. It is fitting that the Keryx, the Mercurial mediator, is the one present whilst this operation is performed. Furthermore the Keryx is representative of the hermaphrodite Hermes, composed of male and female, Mars and Venus.

Alchemy of the Officers

This four-fold alchemical pattern can be extended to the three main officers and is seen in the colour of the tabards that they wear. The Hieres, with his black tabard, represents the process of putrefaction. His station in the West is the 'Place of the Guardian against the Multitudes that sleep through the Light and awaken at the Twilight.' If you overlay the Tree of Life over the 0=0 temple layout, the Heireus is in Malkuth, the Earth from which all physical life is born and is ultimately returned.



(3) Ibid

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The Hegemon, with her white tabard, is connected with the Albedo and Citrinitas stages. On the Tree of Life, her station between the pillars connects to lunar Yesod (Albedo). As stated in the Neophyte temple opening ritual, she leads the candidate on 'the Path that conducts from Darkness (Nigredo) to Light.' When she gives the new Neophyte their sash, which symbolises their awakening, she is embodying the Citrinitas stage with its first glimmer of light that heralds the impending Solar Dawn.

The Hierophant, with his red tabard, is the Rubedo phase. He is the 'Guardian of the Dawning Sun' and as such embodies the alchemical process of fermentation which gives new life to a substance, resurrects it. In the 0=0 opening, the Hierophant declares that his red robe represents the uncreated and created fire, the essence of Geburah (Mars) and Netzach (Venus) which meet in Tiphareth and create the Reddening. His station equates roughly to Tiphareth consciousness, Solar light and the source of higher spiritual illumination.

Throughout the 0=0, the candidate has symbolically been shown the alchemical processes that must be mastered. The rough, unhewn stone must be refined and turned into the perfection of the quintessence of their own soul. Their journey through the Outer Order should help them discover their divine illustriousness, as their soul burns its way from seed to blooming rose on the cross of sacrifice.

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