

# HERBAL ALCHEMY



PHILLIP HURLEY

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by

Phillip Hurley

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ISBN: 978-0-9837847-0-8

Wheelock Mountain Publications

is an imprint of

Good Idea Creative Services

Wheelock VT USA

[www.goodideacreative.com](http://www.goodideacreative.com)

Copyright ©1977, ©2001, ©2011 Phillip Hurley  
ISBN: 978-0-9837847-0-8

Revised edition published 2001 in print  
Maithuna Publications, Wheelock, Vermont  
ISBN 0-9710125-0-4  
Library of Congress Control Number: 2001117030

Original edition published 1977  
Lotus Publications, Chicago, Illinois

Editing, Cover Illustration, Cover and Book Design  
by Good Idea Creative Services

Illustrations by Kasia Lynch and Good Idea Creative Services

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# *Introduction*

Alchemy is an ancient spiritual practice and art, understood by very few people throughout its long history. This is still true in the modern world. Most contemporary works on the subject are mere historical sketches of what is regarded as an arcane science. From an Alchemist's point of view, this is unfortunate, because Alchemy is very much alive and thriving, more so now than ever before.

The old alchemical assertion that it was possible to change one element into another was widely ridiculed. But now, on a daily basis scientists perform such transmutations in their laboratories, turning one element into another with high powered accelerators. Other scientists are working to unlock the secrets of low temperature-low energy transmutation, a process which the Alchemists of old said was possible. The advent of quantum physics has brought forth startling revelations about the connection between consciousness and matter, and the effect of the observer on the observed. In this new light, old inscrutable alchemical axioms that once seemed nonsense can now be understood; and the essence of alchemical doctrine is actually becoming part of the mainstream spiritual-scientific thought of our times.

What is Alchemy? The origin of the name itself is somewhat obscure, but it is generally thought to be an ancient reference to Egypt. Egypt was called the land of Chem or Cham, meaning "land of black earth," which in Alchemy also refers to prima materia (first matter). Al or El refers to the prime source, infinite spirit or absolute. So, "Alchemy" refers to the art itself, and to ancient Egypt.

India and China both also have long traditions of Alchemy. In India, the legends of the Tantric Alchemists Kankanapa and Nagarjuna are the basis for the story of the radiant jewel in the lotus, which in turn is the origin of the famous Vajrayana mantra Om Mani Padme Hum. It is interesting to note that the jewel within the lotus is called the three-fold jewel (tri-ratna), about which legend states, “He who possesses this jewel overcomes death and rebirth and gains immortality and liberation.” The jewel itself is the same as the Philosophers Stone of the Alchemists, and it is no coincidence that the Egyptians referred to Toth as “thrice great,” and the Greeks referred to Hermes similarly, as Trismegistus.

It is also no coincidence that the vajra of Indra is one of the most important symbols for Tantrics. The vajra is Indra’s power or magical tool, and in the Tantric tradition it is symbolic of the highest spiritual power. These philosophies arose directly from Vedic culture and its derivative yogas, as did most of the later Taoist and Buddhist alchemical traditions.

Through whatever tradition the science of Alchemy is studied, it should become apparent that Alchemy applies to organic forms of life as well as what is considered inorganic; and to what is considered the “immaterial” as well as the “material.” From the Alchemist’s point of view, everything has consciousness; thus distinctions such as organic and inorganic, or material and immaterial fade one into the other.

Put very simply, Alchemy is the science of “the Source,” the universal spirit, the absolute. This source is considered the Grand Alchemist, and its body or manifestation in all dimensions is its laboratory or realm of being – our universe.

## *Introduction*

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Very few people are aware of the profundity and breadth of the alchemical path. To be an Alchemist, one must be all at once a mystic, a magician, and a scientist. Intuition, intellect and action are smoothly integrated, each of them informing the others. In the Alchemist's unending quest for knowledge, all aspects of existence are proper subjects for meditation, experimentation and analysis. William Blake put it well, "The true method of knowledge is experiment. All of life for us is experiment and discovery," and again in the words of Blake, "To see a world in a grain of sand, And a heaven in a wildflower, hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour."

The goal of the Alchemist is to center themselves within the consciousness of the ultimate creative principle, so that they can understand the universe in all its diversity as one great process. Alchemical tradition states that from this center of creative consciousness, all can be comprehended and experienced. This point of centering is the esoteric Philosophers Stone, and is the understanding diverse spiritual disciplines express with such terms as cosmic consciousness, satori, enlightenment, and so forth. The Alchemist derives knowledge from this center of creative consciousness – and it resides within the Alchemist themselves.

In all spiritual disciplines, the key to understanding the nature of the universe, the secret of the Philosophers Stone, is contained within. For example, in the Tantric tradition the mani or Philosophers Stone lies in the padma, the lotus of the heart. All Yoga systems refer every question and answer back to the self. In Tantric Yoga this is stated quite aptly in the mantra Aum Aham Brahma Smi meaning, "I am the creator."

3 So, the beginning of the quest for the Philosophers Stone is an inner journey which requires a study of oneself and the development of intuition. The Alchemist must learn to feel mystically the principles worked with, remembering the hermetic axiom, "as above so below, as within so without." This

requires many years of consistent practice of the art of meditation. The prime meditation during these years is on the Philosophers Stone, the center of universal consciousness, the creative spark.

The next step is for the Alchemist to transfer this mystical feeling into knowledge, which usually takes place as one progresses in the practice of meditation. This process of transformation, that is, transmuting intuition into knowledge, is the attainment of magical knowledge or what is referred to in the east as siddhi (the power that comes from knowing).

The completion of this process, for lack of a better word, we will call meta-scientific. It is the direct linking up of mystical feeling and magical knowledge to dense substance or physical plane material. In other words, the intuitive feeling of the mystical experience is translated into an intellectual knowing, which informs action, affecting the materia of all three planes – physical, mental, and astral.

Essentially the Alchemist operates as a magician and a mystic, and can also produce the same metaphysical cause and effect phenomena through physical plane disciplines. They seek not only to discover the universal consciousness within, but then proceed to translate this knowledge into active expression, and with this cosmic creativity, transform themselves and the world around them. So, in addition to studying the techniques of magic and mysticism, the Alchemist is a student of the techniques of their own chosen physical plane pursuits, whether arts or science, but not limited to these mundane categories. The Alchemist's access to the knowledge and inspiration of the Philosophers Stone makes their work, whether art, craft or science, "come alive." For indeed, every human endeavor, every movement in time and space has its source and its affects, and is a possible subject for the Alchemist's meditation and experimentation. All life is cosmic art to the Alchemist.

The Alchemist can perceive in the operation of an atomic or molecular structure, a part of the mystical body of the ultimate source, or a blade of grass and the song of a bird – and in any of these things, the others. It is a continuity of consciousness so profound that words cannot describe it.

In this work on the lesser arcanum of Alchemy, we will deal with the three modes of alchemical expression as a whole in the context of the art of Herbal Alchemy. This represents only a small part of the scope of Alchemy, but it is hoped that even those who do not have an affinity for working with the plant world will be able to learn something useful about the art of Alchemy that can be applied to their own fields of interest. The intent of this book is not to provide recipes, but to give people a starting point for working with alchemical techniques. Truly, the whole point of Alchemy is to NOT be a slave to any book or formula, but to meditate, experiment and analyze, and come to one's own conclusions.

Today quantum physics tells us that all matter and its actions are affected by the observer. This is why the magical ritual method included in this work is of prime importance and should not be taken lightly.



Finally, the Alchemist must realize that Alchemy is not owned by any philosophical-theological group or religion. Again, the words of William Blake will help the student to understand that while researching alchemical literature, one should skim the overlay and look deeper for the essence of the work.

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses,  
Calling them by the names and adorning them  
With the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations,  
And whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive.  
And particularly they studied the genius of each city and country,  
    placing it under its mental deity.  
Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of  
And enslaved the vulgar by attempting to realise or abstract the mental  
    deities from their objects;  
Thus began Priesthood, choosing forms of worship from Poetic tales.  
And at length they announced that the Gods had ordered such things  
Thus men forgot that all deities reside in the human breast.

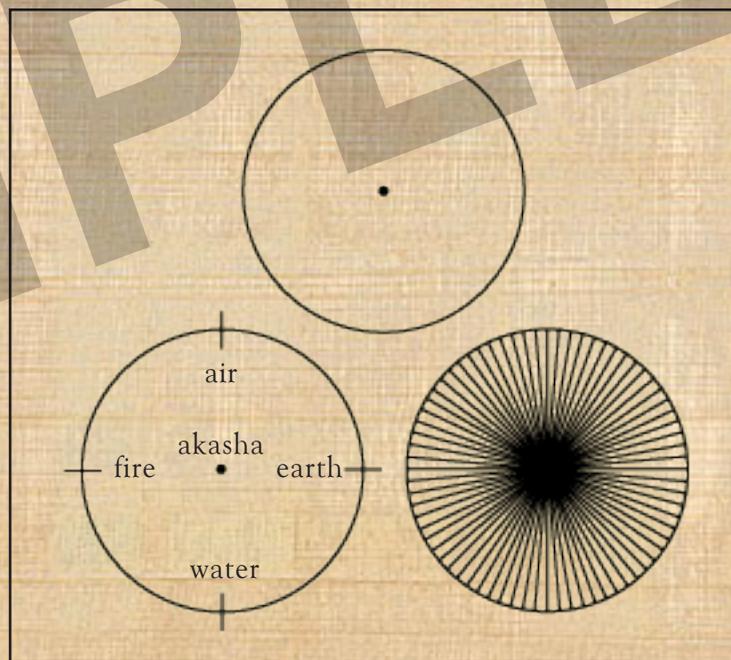
*William Blake (1757-1827)*

To be an Alchemist, you must realize that you are the beginning and end of all things and the interplay in between. No one can give you this knowledge but yourself, no one can give you enlightenment but yourself.

# Hermetic Philosophy, Theory and Practice

Each major spiritual discipline has a magical glyph which creatively synthesizes its philosophy. For Alchemy, the major initiation diagrams are the symbol of the planet Mercury, the Caduceus of Hermes, and the simple circle-point mandala. Each of these, though visually different, represents the same philosophical concepts. They are drawn differently according to octave of use. To comprehend these symbols is to understand the entire creative process of Alchemy.

Our first consideration is the circle-point mandala. According to alchemical lore, the universe first manifested itself as the universal creative spark. For an analogy, this can be considered an electrical charge. Simultaneously, a magnetic field of 360 degrees was created around the central spark. This universal magnetic field became the etheric substructure for all manifestation, and explains the old Alchemists' axiom that all things were created simultaneously. Physicists know that with every electrical charge you must have a surrounding magnetic field. If you remove either the electrical charge or the magnetic field, the other collapses. Thus in saying that everything



Three versions of the circle point mandala

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## ☾ The Moon

The Moon represents the Water principle, the reflective and transparent properties of materia, and the nature of crystalline formation. It also rules the subconscious mind and the etheric substrate of matter. This is the octave at which the Alchemist acts most directly in alchemical operations, thus the understanding of the Moon and the etheric tides of matter is a great deal of what mundane Alchemy is all about.

The Moon is the universal solvent at the etheric level, so it is here that the Alchemist begins their work, not only dissolving past tendencies of the subconscious mind (solve phase), but also the substance of materia in the laboratory. It is through the bringing together (conjunction) of inner and outer in the laboratory (both the inner and outer laboratory) that the Alchemist begins to see what quantum physics is just learning in its fledgling stages – which is that the observer affects the results. This is why the Moon rules mirrors – the universe has a reflective component (which everything has at some level). To a certain extent, what we see or discover at any level is a reflection of our own selves.

The etheric matrix is most pliable at certain phases of the Moon, thus certain actions are more easily performed at particular points in the lunar cycle. These tides can be replicated by the Alchemist to some degree through the art of physical manipulation, or by the active application of magical knowledge. For instance, when working with the creation of alchemical plant preparations, the solve phase (separation into various components) proceeds the best during the waxing of the Moon when the Moon separates and moves to the opposition of the Sun. In the coagula phase (when the materials are recombined) the period from Full to New Moon is most auspicious.

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The zenith (overhead) position, and the nadir, ascendant and descendant positions of the Moon all have powerful effects on the etheric substrate, which in turn affects matter and psychology. The polarized light of the Moon can make it possible to see into the etheric substrate and thus the phenomenon of apparitions and such are more frequent during this time. The magician-Alchemist uses the lunar cycles to materialize various evoked forces and forms. The Moon is related to the matrix of all form and is Yesod in the Quabbala.

### Lunar Plants in Application

Moon ruled plants affect the subconscious mind. Those involved in hypnosis or auto-hypnosis will find that, when properly impregnated for the desire at hand, these herbs have a powerful effect on the subconscious mind. Any intent, such as a wish to get rid of a certain bad habit, etc., put into a lunar alchemical elixir affects the lunar sphere of our being on all planes.

The lunar herbs can provoke memories of past lives. They provide a channel through the space-time matrix of consciousness, enabling clear perception either through vision or feeling, of past experiences. This can help the Alchemist become aware of the reason for the presence of certain habits which are quite unexplainable from the mundane point of view. If lunar elixirs are impregnated properly in the alchemical manner, karma from the past in the form of bad habits can be lessened in strength or completely eliminated, depending upon the strength and impetus of the causal stress. In many cases the subconscious is the unwitting carrier of our fears and complexes from past lives. A proper regimen with this type of elixir will help to remove such burdensome fears and reactions to the environment which we carry, but which are totally useless, and are only stumbling blocks in our path to the light.

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Lunar elixirs are an immense aid in astral projection. The moon at one level has rulership of the astral plane, and lunar elixirs increase awareness of astral form and function. They also produce an interest in common matters and the home environment, and will enhance receptivity and appreciation of the simpler things in life. Use of these elixirs gives grace to the gait and easier attunement to those around you, putting you into rhythm with the crowd. The Moon's herbs increase sensitivity and imagination. Their physical therapeutic properties are emetic, alterative, sedative.

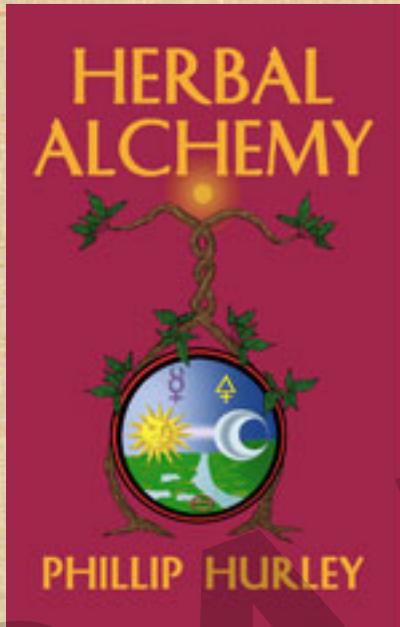
### Plants of the Moon

COMMON NAME	LATIN NAME	PART USED
Arrowhead (Wapatoo)	Sagittaria sagittifolia	tubers
Burnet, Lesser	Sanguisorba officinalis	herb, root
Cabbage	Brassica oleracea	leaf
Caltrops (Water Chestnut)	Trapa natans	tuber
Chickweed	Stellaria media	herb
Clary Sage	Salvia sclarea	leaf (fresh & dry)
Cucumber	Cucumis sativus	fruit, seed
Dog's Tooth Violet	Erythronium dens canis	root
Lettuce	Lactuca sativa	leaf
Loosestrife	Lysimacha vulgaris	herb

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## Plants of the Moon continued

COMMON NAME	LATIN NAME	PART USED
Lotus Root	Nelumbo nucifera	fresh root
Moonwort (Honesty/Money Plant)	Lunaria annua	leaf
Orach (Mountain Spinach)	Atriplex hortensis	leaf
Orpine	Sedum telephium	leaf, plant
Privet	Ligustrum vulgare	flower, leaf
Purslane	Portulaca oleracea (sativa)	leaf
Roses, White <i>e.</i> Rosa rugosa alba	Rosa (species)	petals
Watercress	Nasturtium officinale	leaf, flower, seed
Willow Tree	Salix (species)	bark



# Herbal Alchemy by Phillip Hurley

New revised edition, Paperback 2001

Kindle edition 2011

When originally published in 1977, Herbal Alchemy broke new ground as the first straight-forward written presentation of Alchemy in a complete, practical form; as science, art, technique, philosophy, magick, and spiritual discipline. In this revised and updated edition, Phillip Hurley provides detailed information about the preparation of alchemical elixirs from plants, the application of astrology to herbalism, and reveals secrets of occult ritual practice in the Tantric and Quabbalistic traditions.

*“Herbal Alchemy integrates magical practices with laboratory work.”*  
*The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic by Israel Regardie*

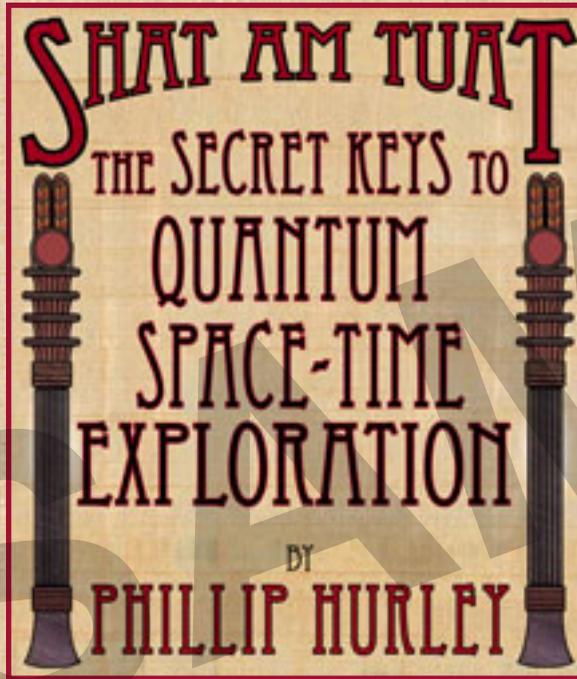
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## Also by Phillip Hurley

### Shat Am Tuat: the Secret Keys to Quantum Space-Time Exploration



Shat Am Tuat and the Book of Gates are collections of ancient Egyptian teachings for astral projection and out-of-body experiences. Partial texts of these teachings survive on the tomb walls of pharaohs, but over thousands of years the sound keys (mantras) that unlock the star (astral) gates to the "other worlds" were only passed from initiate to initiate.

The other worlds are the multiple dimensions of space-time implied by quantum theory. With the keys and meditation techniques presented here, you can explore the frontiers of human consciousness.

Phillip Hurley, has been teaching these techniques for over 30 years, and is an initiate of several esoteric and occult traditions. In Shat Am Tuat: the Secret Keys to Quantum Space-Time Exploration he presents the de-

tails of mantra based astral projection methods and shares many vignettes of his own out-of-body experiences. 71 pages, illustrated, published June 2011 in PDF format.