

Day 5 The Indwelling Spirit

The Great Work of Alchemy and the Sacred Marriage

base metal into gold The process of the Soul's Transformation and reunion with the Divine Ground

The figure of Christ in the West Door

In the central portal of the Western façade of Chartres we see the figure of Christ, contained within the *mandorla* or *vesica piscis* and surrounded by the symbols of the four apostles. He presents not only the image of a cosmic being who has incarnated on this planet to offer a path of reconnection to the divine ground but an image of the sacredness of the whole of creation and the divinity that is present within each one of us — the fully awakened and enlightened man and woman we have the power to become, recovering our true identity as cosmic beings. This great image calls us to awaken to cosmic consciousness and, in the words of T.S. Eliot's great poem *Ash-Wednesday*, to “Redeem the unread vision in the higher dream.”

The Buddha and Christ arising from the tomb

These images of two of the greatest teachers of humanity represent the Awakened State that is a potential within all of us. In India the path to the awakened state is called Nagayuna – the Path of the Serpent – naga being a word for serpent. This is the origin of Kundalini yoga which goes back to Vedic times and is many thousands of years old. This Buddhist sculpture from Thailand carries forward the ancient Vedic tradition of raising the immense creative power of instinct from a state of unconsciousness to a state of fully awakened or illumined consciousness. The teaching of Christ aimed to show the path to awakening that He Himself embodied as he is shown here rising out of the tomb with the sleeping soldiers at his feet who are unaware of what is happening above their heads.

Five Concepts of Spirit

1. Spirit is present in every aspect of the phenomenal world: the Vedic culture of India and the lunar cultures of the Great Mother.
2. Spirit emanates from a divine source: Divine Father and Mother; transcendent & immanent — Kabbalah
3. Spirit is wholly transcendent: the Patriarchal image of God
4. Spirit does not exist: the modern secular belief of scientific rationalism
5. Spirit is present in every atom of matter. All is the Divine Life

Once, long ago, spirit was not outside us. We were within Spirit. All life was spirit. Spirit was the air we breathed, present within every aspect of life we

experienced. It is this utterly different perspective on life that we have lost —yet it still lives deep within our instinctual soul. Alchemy kept this alive for us for over four thousand years and we are recovering it now.

As I mentioned in my book, many years ago I had a dream that led me to a new understanding of God – that God was present in all that we call life. I dreamt that I was in a rocky wilderness, above the tree line. Suddenly I heard a voice crying “Help me. Help me”. I looked around and could see no-one. Then I looked down at my feet and realised the voice was coming from a small leather pouch lying on the ground. I picked it up and opened it. Inside was a small stone. This dream led me to alchemy which was and is about rescuing the neglected aspect of spirit that is hidden within matter, nature and ourselves.

An Emerging Concept of God or Spirit

We participate in a Cosmic Consciousness or Intelligence which is co-inherent with every particle of our being and every particle of matter. God or Spirit or Divine Mind is not something transcendent to ourselves. We are co-inherent with it, at the very heart of It.

Spirit, so long projected onto a transcendent Creator, remote from our world, is the quintessential consciousness which is awaiting discovery both in nature and ourselves. This is one of the great revelations of our time.

We have the extraordinary responsibility of helping Spirit to become conscious in this material level of reality. All life is an alchemical process of birth, death and regeneration. Although the gradient for the increase of consciousness in humanity is so slow and arduous, we are all participating in and contributing to a stupendous Cosmic Great Work. This is something the alchemists understood and was the foundation of all their work.

Grail Cup

“Hidden within man there exists a heavenly and divine light which cannot be placed in man from without but must emerge from within.”

Within Manifest Life is a Hidden Reality of the Highest Order

The cosmos calls to us to become aware that we participate in its life, that everything is sacred and connected, that the cosmos has a soul and that we can learn how to communicate with that soul.

There has always been a chain of teachers (known as the Golden Chain or catena d’oro) who have transmitted their knowledge and insight from generation to generation over thousands of years. Two great streams of alchemical knowledge, one flowing from Egypt and the other from Persia, Arabia and Islamic Spain, came together in Europe in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. There

were some 4000 alchemists working in Europe between 1200 and 1650 and they created dozens of alchemical texts and images. Many kabbalists were alchemists and vice-versa. This image is a Kabbalistic one where two men are sharing a vision of the higher worlds. In the central circle are the zodiacal signs.

What is the treasure that Western civilisation has ignored or overlooked? What is the gold that is not the common gold? The Great work of Alchemy tells us that we have our source in the starry ground of the Cosmos, that we are literally star-life in every cell of our being. The whole of cosmic and planetary evolution is an alchemical process, an ongoing process of creation and transformation, of dissolution and regeneration. The Cosmos calls to us to be aware that we participate in its life, that everything is sacred and connected—one life, one source, one spirit. The Great Work of Alchemy refines the base metal of our understanding so that we – evolved from the fiery substance of the stars – can know ourselves as spirit. It heals the deep wound in the human soul that has come into being because of a sense of alienation, loneliness and separation from the divine. It tells us who we are and why we are here.

Mercurius in Sea of Being

Alchemy and Kabbalah kept alive the idea that spirit is present in nature. This is an image of Mercurius in the sea of the Soul with the words *Filius Noster* – Our Son above it. The origin of Mercurius goes back to Hermes or the Egyptian Thoth, the guide to the underworld. But he also descends from the Green Man and the dying and resurrected gods of Bronze Age lunar mythology. Mercurius represents the other Son or Daughter, that lost aspect of spirit that is hidden in Nature. The teachers of the School of Chartres believed that the Liberal Art of Dialectica led to his sphere of influence. Many alchemical images portray Mercurius or Hermes with a caduceus and its entwined serpents which suggest a connection to the Kabbalah and the Indian tradition of Kundalini Yoga where two serpents are entwined around the central channel of the sushuma.

The alchemists named Mercurius the living gold, the divine fire, the *Lumen Naturae* — the creative spirit hidden within matter, within all of Nature. However, and this is the Mystery — Mercurius is the divine fire of the spirit as well as the subtle body of the soul. He or she (because he could often take a feminine form) is the primal matter that is to be transformed by spirit, the agent of transformation as well as the goal of the longed-for treasure — the philosophical gold, elixir or stone. What the alchemists are saying is that Mercurius is everything and everything is spirit viewed at different stages of its own transformation.

Alchemist following in footsteps of Nature

Alchemy flows beneath the surface of western civilisation like a river of gold, preserving its images for us so that we might one day understand our presence on this planet better than we do. Here is an image of the alchemist following in

the footsteps of Nature, holding in his hand a lantern which signifies the light of insight. I will show you many other images of the alchemical process, some of them exquisitely beautiful.

The Great Work of Alchemy is about recovering the lost lunar sense of participatory awareness, the lost sense of relationship with all creation. It is about reanimating the poetic vision, the imaginative sensibility that once connected us to nature and the cosmos. At the same time it is about growing into our unique individuality, differentiating ourselves from the values that presently control the political and religious life of humanity, living from a totally different perspective on life without seeing oneself as superior to other people or forcing one's views upon them.

Alchemy is called the “Royal Art”

Each one of us carries latent within us the royal value—the greater, finer, more complete or whole person we are capable of becoming, symbolized by the mysterious stone or gold of the alchemists. Alchemy is a process of revelation, incarnation, illumination and transfiguration. This is the meaning of the Vision of Grail.

It is the science of transmuting the base metal of the pre-conscious soul into the gold of the awakened soul that is reunited with its cosmic ground. The emphasis is on building awareness of and communion with spirit and creating an incorruptible body of light or subtle body that will hold this relationship beyond the death of the physical body.

Our Gold is not the Common Gold

The alchemists said: “There are two categories in this art, namely, seeing with the eye and understanding with the heart, and this is the hidden stone, which is fitly called a gift of God – and this divine stone is the heart and tincture of gold which the philosophers seek.”

The Great Work of Alchemy

Is about the relationship between man and the cosmos. The creation of an immortal “body of light”, the integration of body, soul and spirit and the conscious reunion with the *unus mundus* or the divine ground of being.

There is no doubt that the alchemists had remarkable dreams and visions, possibly assisted by taking hallucinogenic drugs since they had a knowledge of herbs. I am sure they practiced some form of meditation. In paying close attention to these visions and dreams, they kept alive the shamanic tradition of the lunar era. They saw their work as connecting them to a hidden dimension of reality, engaging in dialogue with it and being transformed by it. In doing this, they believed they were creating what they called an immortal body, a body of light, in which they would live after their death. They also believed that life had

the intention to evolve and that they could assist this by working with nature, freeing their own consciousness from the dross of habits and beliefs that impeded the unfolding of this evolutionary intention.

Rainbow Bridge

Alchemy threw a rainbow bridge between matter and spirit, holding the connection between the seen and the unseen, the Above and the Below
So the alchemists said: “Whoever shall make the hidden manifest knoweth the whole work.”

So much of what they discovered is coming into consciousness now, at this time of humanity’s awakening.

Alchemy is not merely an art or science

to teach metallic transmutation, so much as a true and solid science that teaches how to know the centre of all things, which in the divine language is called the spirit of life”.

Alchemy is a gradual process of attunement to the hidden dimension of spirit. We see only the physical universe. What about the invisible 96% that we can’t see?

The Great Work of Alchemy

Where Christianity taught that the Redeemer is outside us and that our ultimate redemption (as Christians) has been assured by Christ’s sacrificial death, alchemy taught that the alchemist can become the redeemer or rescuer of the lost aspect of spirit hidden within himself and nature, working with spirit to accomplish its awakening within him. This gives great significance to the individual since the divine drama of redemption is consummated in and through us. It is an awesome and heroic task. Each one of us carries the mystery of the incarnation of spirit in this dimension. Alchemy is a sacred rite of unification, an *opus divinum* which ultimately reveals or brings to birth the innate divinity of man and woman.

Killing the Old King

Alchemy gives us the image of a king who has to die in order that his son may rule in his stead. We can identify the Old King — the king who needs to die — with the deficient values and belief system that currently rule our culture, that have ruled it for millennia. In relation to the individual, the Old King personifies a consciousness that knows nothing of its deeper ground. We can also identify the Old King with an outworn image of spirit that needs to be relinquished in order for a new image to emerge from the depths of the soul. Just as from time to time, we have to buy new clothes to replace worn out ones, so an image of spirit which has long presided over a civilisation may need to be discarded in order for spirit to be reborn in a new form. There is a beautiful text that accompanies an image from the Splendor Solis which says:

Young King

“The King's son lies in the depths of the sea as though dead. But he lives and calls from the deep: Whosoever will free me from the waters and lead me to dry land, him will I prosper with everlasting riches.”

So here the spirit is calling out for help. The King's Son in the text and in this picture personifies the different consciousness and values generated by a deeper communion with spirit. Two thousand years ago, Jesus was the ‘Young King’ who brought potential renewal to the culture of that time and the possibility of a transformation of our values. Five hundred years before him, the Buddha did the same for his culture in India. St Francis was to do the same for 13th century Italy and Jung, in my view, did the same for Western culture in the twentieth century.

The Seven themes of Alchemy

The Seven Themes and Tasks of Alchemy describe the process of death and renewal.

1. The descent into the underworld and the return
2. the struggle with a superhuman adversary – serpent/dragon/monster
3. death and rebirth or regeneration
4. The winning of a priceless treasure
5. transformation
6. the sacred marriage
7. the birth of the divine child – the fruit of that union

The Seven Tasks of Alchemy

1. The rescue of the aspect of spirit lost in matter
2. The process of transformation involved in this rescue
3. The death of the old king and queen (the old dissociated consciousness)
4. The birth of the young king and queen (the new integrated solar and lunar consciousness)
5. The union of the two natures = the hermaphrodite
6. The conscious union of body, soul and spirit
7. The re-union with what the alchemists called the *unus mundus* – the divine ground

Lunar Queen and Solar King

Alchemy sets its supreme quest in the context of a marriage between the Solar and Lunar aspects of the soul, the fiery gold of the solar masculine element and the volatile silver of the lunar feminine one: a union between our head and our heart, between our rational consciousness focused through thinking, and our instinctive consciousness focussed through the heart—through intuition and feeling. This marriage also ultimately unites the invisible dimension of the subtle world with the visible material world of our experience. What this whole process amounts to is not only a transformation but a revelation.

Imagination is the Star in Man: the Celestial and super-Celestial Body

An alchemist called Ruland the Lexicographer said: “Imagination is the star in man – the celestial and super-celestial body.” For the alchemists the imagination is much more than a faculty. It is a psychic reality, a subtle body or field that we tune into when we create from the deepest level. Think of Chartres Cathedral and what the Masters of the Compasses tuned in to. It is like another dimension which interpenetrates our dimension and interacts with it. It seems to act as a bridge between the visible and invisible worlds. It seems to be the very ground of our consciousness, something which underlies the physical reality we perceive with our 5 senses yet cannot be perceived by them although it can be sensed by them. Jung said that “the subtle body is a transcendental concept which cannot be expressed in terms of our language or our philosophical views, because they are all inside the categories of time and space.”

The Lesser Work

The Creation of the White Stone or Rose

Alchemy defines three and sometimes four stages in the Great Work of transforming the soul and bringing forth the stone or gold. This process is circulatory and continuous and moves through the different phases over and over again. The whole process is about the expansion of consciousness, about deepening our connection with the subtle field of the Soul.

The Stages of the Lesser Work are governed by Fire and Water: the transformative fire, and the cleansing, clarifying waters of the soul. (compare beef bouillon)

The Lesser Work

The First Stage:

Separating the soul from the body:

the *Nigredo or Separatio*... phase of death and dissolution

Recurring Depression: “a blackness blacker than black”

The encounter with the Dragon.

symbol: the Raven

The alchemists saw the **Nigredo** or **Separatio** as the state of blind suffering and ignorance before the dawning of awareness. They also called this state the *unio naturalis* — meaning the state where we live from day to day, responding to events as they happen; where we believe we have control of our lives but are the victim of events, and the complexes, beliefs, archaic drives and instinctual habits which control us. In this state the spirit is not awake, not free, but is the prisoner or victim of all these things. To awaken from this state involves the separation of the conscious and unconscious aspects of the soul that have been bound together in a kind of incestuous union where the conscious mind or ego that has emerged from the matrix of nature, is still unconsciously bound to it.

So the Nigredo is the phase of the ego's dying and death as it gives up its illusion of freedom, supremacy, power and control and becomes aware of a deeper dimension of the psyche which may come as a great shock to it. It also involves the encounter with the dragon or the primordial soul that I talked about in Day 3 on the Shadow. Making it conscious.

Separatio involves conflict and suffering and bewilderment. The original sense of the oneness of our being is split into two. Yet, paradoxically, this work of differentiation is the first stage of reuniting the conscious solar aspect of the psyche with the instinctual lunar aspect.

Calcinatio

The fire of transformation burns and transforms all the dross in our nature until the unconscious state of fusion with our instincts is transmuted into a higher, more conscious form. The strange male/female form shown here is called the rebus – an intermediate state before the formation of the hermaphrodite. It is an image of what the alchemists called the first coniunctio when the previous unconscious state is differentiated into two separate yet conjoined units. Here the rebus is undergoing the burning away of the dross that has covered the gold of the spirit. Whiteness in the fire. Turned to ashes. Fire in this phase is the main agent of transformation.

Collectively, humanity in the last century and this one has been through a terrible calcinatio. We have witnessed the images of incineration in the gas ovens of Auschwitz, the fire bombing of Dresden, the obliteration of Hiroshima, death by napalm, depleted uranium and white phosphorus bombs, the ruthless bombing of houses and cities, the horrific fiery destruction of the twin towers. Millions of helpless civilians have died in these events.

Mortificatio

“No new life can arise without the death of the old.”

Here we have an image of the descent into the grave or the underworld of the psyche and the emergence of the transformed initiate. We see the sowing of seeds that will be transformed into the green shoots of regeneration. This image goes back to Egypt and the annual return of the dismembered god Osiris in the form of the wheat that grew from the mud deposited on the banks of the Nile.

Beheading and dismembering Image

Here is an image of a man holding a sword and a golden severed head, standing in front of a dismembered body. This image takes us back to the lunar myths of death and regeneration and to the mysteries of Egypt and the dismemberment and regeneration of Osiris so we can know that after the experience of dying, there will be regeneration.

Dismemberment is an image of letting go of old beliefs and changing the

patterns of behaviour in which the life spirit has become imprisoned, entangled or buried. It's about undoing the structure we find ourselves in, the adaptation to our culture, its beliefs and values. Psychic growth is a very painful process for the ego or conscious mind and this image of dismemberment reflects it. But again you see the beautiful border round the edge which symbolises bringing oneself into relationship with nature and the flowering of nature within us.

The melancholia and suffering of the alchemist is also the anguish of spirit itself undergoing the travail and pain of sacrifice and transformation. The spirit suffers with us in the agonising experiences of our own lives because we are part of spirit. Both we and spirit are participating in a Cosmic Passion Play.

The Second Stage: the Albedo or Solutio:

“This Divine Water makes the dead living and the living dead; it lightens the darkness and darkens the light.”

The opening of the heart; the shedding of tears, the dawning of illumination, insight and wisdom.

symbols: the Queen, moonlight, the White Stone or Rose, the Lily, the Dove, the Swan.

The Albedo is the phase of baptism or immersion in the watery womb of the soul. It is a process of washing, cleansing, purifying, seeing more clearly. It is the dawning of the light of insight and wisdom. The alchemists compared this stage to the gradual whitening of the sky after the darkness of night and also to the moon or moonlight. It's about the awakening of the feminine lunar principle (moonlight), the awakening of the heart, of compassion, for oneself and for the world. It's about dissolving rigid, fixed beliefs, melting the snow and ice of frozen feelings. Feeling is released like a fountain from the depths of the soul and seeks expression in life in some form. In this phase comes the discovery of unknown potential, gifts, possibilities, softness, fluidity, relatedness, compassion. Many tears are shed. It's about integrating the shadow, both the latent and unknown creative aspects and the destructive aspects that are the result of deep wounds to the heart. So it's all about inner transformation.

Man in tub with dove of Holy Spirit

The alchemist sits in a tub while an assistant uses the bellows to increase the fire and the heat. The dove of the Holy Spirit rests on his head. Water washes, cleanses, renews. Fire burns, purifies, transmutes. By these processes the primal matter of our psychic life is refined, cleansed, rendered more subtle and translucent to the ground of spirit. By these methods the quintessential gold of the spirit emerges from beneath the rust or verdigris that has accrued to it over the millennia of human evolution. The passionate intensity of devotion to the work is the Fire that transforms, the fire deriving from spirit itself.

Drawing Dark Man out of the Mud

In another image from this exquisite book, *Splendor Solis*, a dark man carrying in his limbs the three colours of the alchemical process – black, white and red – emerges from the black mud of the nigredo. He is greeted by a woman who has white wings and a crown and star on her head. She is Divine Wisdom or Sophia. She holds the red robe which symbolises the Rubedo or final stage of alchemy and a new, regenerated consciousness. Her yellow sleeve hints at the gold of the final stage. All around this painting are the flowers and animals that are part of the divine unity of life. This image also goes back to the Egyptian Mysteries of Osiris reborn as the grain from the mud deposited by the Nile.

The Feminine image of Divine Wisdom as the Holy Spirit is the presiding image of Alchemy. The origin of this may come from the goddess cultures of the lunar era or from the Wisdom texts of the Bible where Wisdom speaks as the Holy Spirit and offers the bread of understanding and the water of wisdom to man. The feminine archetype at its highest level has always been associated with nature and with soul — not soul in a personal sense but soul as the great cosmic sea of being. The alchemists kept alive this ancient concept of soul and took the image of Divine Wisdom as their guide. They knew her to be a living force and active Presence, pouring out the waters of love and illumination onto humanity. Alchemists who were kabbalists knew her as the Shekinah, the Bride of God, and the divine ground of creation.

For many centuries in a European culture that was deeply repressive of the soul and the Feminine, alchemy and Kabbalah secretly carried the image of this disowned aspect of the Divine. Perhaps this is why Marie Louise von Franz says in her introduction to an alchemical text called the *Aurora Consurgens*: “Alchemy lays upon the man the task, and confers upon him the dignity, of rescuing the hidden, feminine aspect of God from imprisonment in matter and of reuniting her with the manifest, masculine deity.”

When the alchemists painted these extraordinary and beautiful images, they were working hand in hand with spirit, to fix spirit in this dimension of experience with the very considerable artistic skills they had. The very act of devotion to this work, communicating with the subtle field of the Soul, developed their insight. This is how the White Stone and the Lunar Queen was constellated within them.

The Lunar Queen

The end of the First Phase and the formation of the White Stone is illustrated by the retort holding the White Lunar Queen illumined by the sun. In this image Mercury sits in a chariot drawn by two cocks, who herald the coming of the dawn. The matter that is being transmuted has now reached a stage of fixation that no fire (of passion) can destroy. Below there is a scene showing the flourishing of the arts and sciences.

Matter has been raised through the first stage of the nigredo and the albedo to a state where it can become the vehicle for the emergence or incarnation of spirit. Part of the work of the albedo is to redeem the body, healing the split between mind and body, becoming aware of the atrocious suffering inflicted on the body throughout the solar era. The origin of all negative projections onto the body is the belief that since the body has to die it must be contaminated by sin and is therefore somehow worthless. A colossal work of healing and transformation is asked for here in order for the body and matter to be recognized as the living expression and vehicle of spirit.

Reaching ever deeper into the heart of their psychic life that was reflected in the mirror of their retort, the alchemists began to see the unity of everything; how the ground of everything is spirit. They saw that matter was not dead, inert. They felt the aliveness of matter, worked to extricate the spirit hidden in matter, entered into a dialogue with it and wept with the wonder and amazement at what they discovered and understood. Their growing insight worked a profound transformation of their consciousness, an illumination of their understanding. “Little by little and from day by day he will perceive with his mental eyes and with the greatest joy some sparks of divine illumination” Gerhard Dorn

The Greater Work: the Rubedo

The creation of an immortal “body of light”, the integration of body, soul and spirit and the union with the divine ground – the *unus mundus*
Symbols: the Red Stone or Rose, the Divine Elixir, the Flower of Immortality, Quintessential Gold, the Phoenix

The Young King

The Young King symbolises the illumined consciousness which is the red tincture, stone or universal medicine that can heal all afflictions. The powers that can impede or destroy the Work have been overcome.

Here Luna, riding in a chariot above, has brought forth the fixed red tincture, the universal healing medicine symbolised by the figure of the young king who stands on an inverted moon and is illumined by the golden rays of the sun. The white lunar soul is now tinctured with the gold of the rising sun.

The stages of the Rubedo are governed by Earth and Air

coagulatio; sublimatio; multiplicatio; fixatio; conjunctio

We are tried in the fire and rendered into gold

This final Phase is about Resurrection and Transfiguration. It is about becoming aware of an entering the immortal body of light – the starry or celestial body that we may ultimately inhabit after our death.

The union of body, soul and spirit in the rising and full radiance of the sun as the symbol of the Divine Ground of Being.

The *Rubedo* signifies the opening of the heart, the release of compassion as a fountain of light flowing towards all life, the Earth, each other. The instinct to heal, nurture, protect and cherish is embodied in action.

The alchemists likened this final stage to the resurrection and to the reddening of the sky as the sun rises to the zenith, irradiating and warming the earth. Red-gold is the colour of the *Rubedo* and the red rose and the red stone are symbols of the completion of the Greater Work.

Phoenix

Another primary symbol of the *Rubedo* is the phoenix: new life regenerated from the ashes of the old, unconscious life, having passed through the fire of transformation. This final stage signifies the awakening to awareness of spirit as guide and companion within the illumined soul – what Jung called the Self. Other symbols of the completed work are the quintessential gold, the Divine Elixir, the Flower of Immortality, the Heavenly Balsam, the perfume of flowers and the celestial blue colour.

The Hermaphrodite

Here, in this beautiful image of the hermaphrodite, the soul of the alchemist has integrated the solar and lunar, conscious and unconscious aspects of his being but also the invisible with the visible dimensions of reality. He/she holds an egg that contains the colours of the phases of the process: the black of the Nigredo, the white of the Albedo, the red of the Rubedo. These are also reflected in the red and white wings and the black body. The man wears a solar halo and the woman a lunar one. The mirror in the centre reflects the surrounding landscape which is also the inner landscape of the soul. The landscape within and without the mirror is tintured with gold.

Alchemical Wedding

Of solar king and lunar queen. This is another image of the Hermaphrodite. Note the dragon whose energy feeds into and through the stones they stand on. Note also the two trees with suns and moons which could represent the two columns or pillars either side of the central pillar in Kabbalah.

As they watched the matter of their own psychic life transform in the mirror of the alchemical retort, the alchemists experienced the immense mystery of what they were witnessing. They realised that they were assisting spirit in the evolutionary effort of bringing itself to consciousness over aeons of earth time, leading its creation back to the source. They had revealed to them in a gradual process of illumination, the innate divinity of nature and all life processes; they saw that one divine spirit was at work in all forms of life and in human consciousness as well. They sought to bring to birth in themselves the hidden spirit that longed to be rescued from its buried state. In accomplishing this double act of redemption, they became the sons of Divine Wisdom, inheritors of

the true philosophical gold. And they became the ministers, not the masters of the stone, their lives illumined and guided by the Holy Spirit eternally pouring forth the water of life.

Man and woman with Grail Cup

This is a modern painting of the alchemical wedding, with a woman and a man who represent the lunar and solar energies of the Cosmos holding the chalice of the Grail. Alchemy is the western tradition of inner psychic transformation. It is a Feminine mystery, a mystery of the soul. The symbols yield their secret to those who contemplate them. The process of transformation is unique for each one of us yet intrinsically the same for all. This is the slow creation of the wondrous stone, the vision of the Holy Grail, the healing with the alchemical gold. This invisible yet immanent Holy Spirit is the flow of life in our veins, the flux and flow of our thoughts, the power of our instincts, the miracle of our bodily processes, the creative genius of our imagination. It is the blazing revelation of the divinity of life in the reunion of body, soul and spirit and the service of that life with whatever creative gifts it has bestowed on us. The gradual creation of the treasure is an experience of great suffering and sacrifice on the one hand and illumination, wonder and inexpressible joy on the other as the light of the unified consciousness dawns.

Quotation about red and white rose and star with man, woman and cup

“In Alchemy, the white and the red rose are well-known symbols for the lunar and the solar tincture, from which the “precious rose-coloured blood” of Christ-Lapis flows. And the Shekinah, the brilliance of celestial wisdom on earth, is understood in the image of the rose, and “the collection of honey” stands for the common inheritance of esoteric knowledge.” So this image brings us back to Chartres and its two great towers that represent the sun and the moon and the great rose windows as portals to this knowledge.

Three Phases of Consciousness

In these five days together we have looked at the three phases of consciousness: lunar, solar and stellar. We can perhaps see where we have come from and where we are going to. In the final phase mind and soul are re-united after their long separation and we can enter into a conscious participation with an ensouled universe. The final stage of alchemy and the completion of the Great Work give rise to a state of consciousness that unites the solar and lunar ways of knowing in a third state that the alchemists called Stellar Consciousness. The Egyptian alchemists called this final state “Living in Truth”. In the view of the alchemists, we are all treading the path of return to the stars

Sol and Luna and Circle of Stars

Here we see Sol and Luna as glorified bodies surrounded by a circle of stars. The small circle symbolises the completed stone, the square the completion of the four stages and the ability of the stone to manifest in the world. The large

triangle signifies the union of the trinity of body, soul and spirit. The circle of stars signifies the connection to the cosmic ground. As a triune whole, Sol and Luna are united in the sacred marriage with the divine ground of being.

The Sacred Marriage

No-one, the alchemists said, may accomplish this work except through humility and love. To return to the ground from which we have come, so completing our evolutionary journey on this planet and bringing the consciousness of the planet with us, is one of the most exciting quests that I can imagine. To discover that spirit, so long projected on a God remote from ourselves and creation, is the quintessential consciousness which is awaiting discovery both in nature and ourselves is one of the greatest revelations that it is possible to experience. The other revelation, no less overwhelming, is that we have the extraordinary privilege of helping this divine consciousness to achieve its evolutionary goal. In awakening to our soul, in discovering how to relate to it, transform it, heal its wounds and listen to its guidance, to receive its dreams and reflect on its visions, we help to bring about that conscious marriage with the ground of life which I believe is the tremendous destiny of the human race.

Because at the quantum level, we are all connected, when thousands of us begin to change our consciousness, millions are affected. I believe that we can heal the terrible errors our beliefs have created. We can choose whether to continue in these beliefs or to live and act from a different relationship with life. As we do so, we would begin to align ourselves with the luminous ground of reality. Our minds would serve the deepest longing of our hearts, the deepest wisdom of our soul. We would transmit the light and love flowing from this ground. We would know who we are and why we are here. We would begin to live the Dream of the Cosmos.

Last slide Gospel of Eve

I am thou and thou art I
and wheresoever thou art, there I am;
and I am scattered in all things,
and from wherever thou wilt, thou gatherest me,
but in gathering me thou gatherest thyself.

Extra bit for discussion after talk

Sublimate the Body and Coagulate the Spirit

Sublimating the body is about lifting it from the low position that has been assigned to it by religions, literally redeeming this neglected aspect of spirit. This has huge implications for the way we treat the earth, matter and each other. Coagulating the spirit is about earthing the insights that have been gained, bringing them into our relationships and our work. The phases and stages of alchemy blend imperceptibly into each other and they are repeated over and over again in a process known as the *circulatio* as the three-fold union of body, soul and spirit proceeds, for there is not one awakening, but many, not one illumination but many.

Coagulatio is a long and difficult stage as one feels the heaviness of being fixed in a life situation that cannot be changed. Many years of patient acceptance. It's really about experiencing at a very deep level the difficulties of spirit being incarnated in matter. One has to wait for the seeds to sprout and grow.

Saturn is the ruler of the coagulatio, holding us down to earth, slowing us down. I would say it applies particularly to the years 50-80. People may come close to death in this phase. The body is receiving the higher, finer vibration of spirit and assimilating this takes time. There can be a great weariness, particularly as the body grows weaker with age. Regret, sorrow that life is coming to an end or that one's work cannot be finished. It could be caring for an elderly parent, having a child return home after a disastrous marriage; looking after grandchildren; enduring an illness or supporting someone who is ill or facing one's own death.

But it is also about applying passion and love to creative work of some kind. Developing a talent or a project that takes many years to mature, such as writing a book. It is about bringing down to the level of everyday life everything that one has learned. Insight has to be brought down to level of body where the body can express it.

Steadiness of focus. Taking care not to become inflated by the numinosity of what is being revealed. Awareness of the shadow earths and coagulates.

Returning to the world after the introversion of the previous stages.

At a meeting with HH the Dalai Lama someone asked what was the most important kind of meditation. His answer surprised all of them: the most important meditation, he said, is critical thinking, followed by action. By critical thinking he meant — inform yourself of what is going on in the world, see what moves us forward and what holds us back, then translate your insights into action. And infuse all your actions with compassion and kindness.

The creation of the new consciousness can be compared to the transformation of grapes into wine, the churning of milk into butter or turning of wheat into bread. The turning of an amateur cook on Masterchef whose hands are shaking with nerves into a professional one, sure of himself and his creative skills. Any one of us who has had a passionate devotion to some form of creative work or work trying to help the world, who has brought up a child or cared for a grandchild will know what I mean. The concentration, commitment and love that are demanded act as a kind of filter, extracting the quintessence of spirit to enter into whatever is the 'matter' life presents one with.

In essence, the coagulatio is about the slow, arduous creation of a new consciousness. One is in the kitchen, transforming basic ingredients into the finished dish but there is present in the psyche a Masterchef presiding over one's efforts. This Masterchef is the Self, the new centre of consciousness, the awakened spirit.

The mystery of this phase is that spirit is becoming conscious in us and we become aware of the heaviness and difficulty of representing spirit in the world. It is easy to become inflated and to think we can teach others before we have gone some way with the process of transformation. A marriage is taking place between ourselves and spirit and is constellating or birthing a new centre within us. We have to walk between two worlds, the invisible realm of the subtle body on the one hand and this world on the other and realise that these two mysteriously interpenetrate and interact with each other. We become aware of synchronicities.

I thought I would read you these words from woman who had a near-death experience.

“It was then that I looked down at my body and with amazement wondered, “Where did this gown come from?” I was no longer bound in heavy, restricting layers of winter wool, but was wearing an exquisite white gown that appeared to be fashioned of a fabric some master designer had created by splashing star dust on filigree spider webs. I watched as it seemed to float above my skin. It was as if a million tiny wings kept it from putting even the weight of a feather on my body. A sense of lightness permeated my being to what I thought must be a cellular – indeed a ‘soulular’ – level.

“And then I heard the MUSIC. It was a tone so sublimely perfect that remembering it still brings me to tears. I knew then, and know now, that I was hearing the symphony of angels, the song of the universe, what some have called ‘the Music of the Spheres’. All thoughts melted in its melody and everything else ceased to be of any importance. I closed my eyes and began to dance, moving to the resonant vibration that coursed through my essence. The melody seemed to issue from a single point and was composed of one verse, a song whose mystical tone my entire being knew and sang. I bathed in its melody as utter joy filled my being, and as the sound washed over my spirit, I felt all confusion purged from my consciousness. “Standing beneath this euphonious canopy of grace, I knew love was being awakened at the depths of my soul. And I began my return to the dawn of totality as a growing sense of Oneness swelled within my heart, mind, and soul.”