



As above, so below

Achievement in the world, however great, does not seem to give a complete sense of satisfaction. Perhaps the greatest human need is for transformation.

In manipulating matter to transform it into gold, alchemists discovered processes which they believed applied equally to the search for human transformation. Humans, they believed, could intervene in the operation of nature and accelerate the process. The secret was to provide heat, which we know in physics is a form of energy.

As the alchemists substitute the athanor or oven, and sometimes the alembic or distiller, for the womb of the earth in the incubation of metals, crystals or elixirs, similarly the meditator uses the body, magnetic field and aura as the vessels in which transformation may be effected. The image is one of building a temple to safeguard the divinity of our being. This is the psychic substitute of the athanor, and our subtle bodies form the altar of the temple.

Alchemists also believe that we are able to use these principles to accelerate transformation, both in the laboratory and in the human psyche. Their methods to trigger off the creative process in nature using energy, which is called quickening, have a close parallel with the transformation skills we develop in meditation. In this article, we will explore the parallels, to find the meditations that carry us through the stages of transformation.

While the alchemical journey shows a similarity in overall pattern for all alchemists, individuals divided the work in particular ways, some into six stages, some into twelve, some into more. I am using the six-stage model of Basil Valentinus.

The First Stage: purge any extraneous elements from your being (Symbolized by Saturn)

As you exhale, contract your abdomen, then your chest. While doing this, consciously drain the toxins of your body, and those idiosyncrasies which you do not like, downwards so that they may be absorbed by the earth. When you inhale, first dilating the abdomen then the chest, experience the earth magnetism, the electro-magnetic field of Planet Earth, rising up your spine like the sap in the trunk of a tree, making what is like a quantum leap from one chakra (and plexus of the autonomic nervous system) to the next. Now as you exhale again, concentrate on the power of pure spirit, a high voltage kind of energy, threading itself down the spine and chasing away impurities.



As a further step, focus on the interfacing and intermeshing between the environment and your life-field. Identify with your electromagnetic field instead of with your body. As you exhale, experience that field extending, and as you inhale feel the electromagnetic field of the planet rushing in and building itself up as your magnetic field. There is no boundary.

Then you can focus on how the environment spills over into your psyche, and the impact that your psyche has on the environment.

The Second Stage: distil the desired elements (Symbolized by Jupiter)

You may distinguish between elements in your being which you consider harmful and wish to reject, and those you feel you could transmute. For example, you will feel that you need to purge deviousness, hatred, cruelty, spite; but could transmute rage into outrage, resentment into rigour, ruthlessness into mastery, passion into love, and so on. So you are performing two operations simultaneously: filtering and distilling. While you exhale you repel those impressions from the environment which are too much out of tune with your real being, and as you inhale you transmute idiosyncrasies that could prove useful if converted.

Thus we proceed to transmute those elements in our personality that are capable of being sublimated and usefully harnessed. We have to abandon our crutches, unmask our mind games, emotional fancies and addictions, and raise the centre of our self-perception to a higher level of values. There is an increasing need for detachment, and we begin to become aware of our subtle body and, at a further stage, our celestial body.

Alchemists recognize the role of heat in powering the transmutation; heat is energy. For the Sufis, this energy can be felt as the streamers of energy in our breath.

You can continue working at this stage by concentrating once more on the current ascending and descending in the spine. As you exhale, again eliminate the elements that are harmful; as you inhale, siphon the telluric forces of the earth, transferring your attention up your spine. You will sense the difference between the grosser and more subtle vibrations, and sense that the grosser ones can be refined. This is the yogic practice of kundalini. In this second phase of the alchemical process, do not lose yourself in a void, but let the forces released by the practice hoist you up through the spheres.



The Third Stage: identify with the quintessence of your being (The Immaculate State, symbolized by the lunar crescent)

This is dependent on the work of the second stage, transmuting the idiosyncrasies that you are not happy with.

Start by becoming vividly aware, for example, of your heart, liver, kidneys, lymph glands, arteries, brain. Then more specifically of the cells, for example, of your fingers.

Now become aware of the zone of energy surrounding your arms, shoulders and head. Imagine that your body extends to this zone. It appears to be a force field. It feels volatile, nebulous, unstable, floating, amorphous, like gossamer. Identify with it, while considering your body as a crystallization of it. It permeates the cells of your body, interspersing with its electrons. You have the impression that you can think and be aware and experience without a body.

Notice that your mind now thinks differently, archetypally. You enjoy intense euphoria, a sense of freedom.

After identifying with the physical radiance surrounding your body, shift your attention to a subtler effulgence which also permeates your physical aura.

It can only sustain itself if you maintain your attunement in a non-worldly state and off-set your consciousness from the perception of your senses.

Reminiscences of angelic impressions will flood into your consciousness as in a state of reverie. You are connecting with your celestial counterpart and intuiting something of the nature of the celestial sphere.

There is a further step. Going beyond the transfigured reality, identify with the programming behind it, then the meaningfulness, then the intention, then the splendour. Give yourself over totally to exulting in a cosmic emotion of glorification, as though you were participating in the celebration of the heavens. While you are doing this, you can focus on those idiosyncrasies that you can transmute and envision them as sublimated. Or you may find it easier to rise above them by affirming your freedom, by disidentifying from them and considering them as extraneous to your pristine being.

Cease to identify yourself with your psyche, which now appears as a support system. Imagine the countenance of your celestial counterpart which conveys to you a sense of innocence, without blemishes, like distilled water.



It seems as though you have awakened back-stage of the universe. Scanning the stars and galaxies, reach out for the celestial spheres: you can imagine that, standing on the earth, you reach aloft, and then still further.

Acknowledge that ultimately you are your realization, irrespective of body or even personality. Discover that your human realization is only the projection of the realization of your celestial being, and beyond this perspective you rise further and further in the realms of significance behind the thinking of the universe.

The Fourth Stage: integrate the constituents of your being (The alchemical marriage, symbolized by Venus)

As you inhale, match the features of your personality with their archetypes. For example, consider the degree to which you are generous, and then expand this into the ultimate generosity of God. As you exhale, imagine that your generosity is increasing in infinite regress as you emulate its perfect model. Continue thus, with other qualities.

Interface the countenance of your subtle bodies with the features you have gained through your ancestral inheritance and your experience of life on this planet. To do this you need to revive your memory of your celestial condition, by attuning to splendour, to beauty, to the extraordinary intelligence programming events, to the power of your life field. Realize that these states are all present within you; they are your celestial inheritance.

Now you can correct the distortions in your incarnated self by impressing your celestial form upon it. Complementarily, you can honour the resourcefulness gained by incarnation, which feeds back into your subtle and celestial being. The alchemical betrothal consists of this intermeshing process of feed-forward with feed-back.

The Fifth Stage: consolidate the transformation that has occurred (Symbolized by Mars)

Realization needs to be actuated as a tangible transformation in your personality; this is creativity: when realization is empowered by an emotional attunement it becomes a configuration which has the capacity to restructure your subtle bodies and ultimately your physical body.

You may concentrate on qualities such as mastery, compassion, truthfulness, joy, peace, freedom, and while doing this imagine the expression that your face would assume if you enhanced that quality in your personality.



The Sixth Stage: eternalize what has been achieved by incarnating (Symbolized by the Sun)

The feed-back into the software of the universe. Incarnate consciously as you exhale, thinking of yourself as pure intelligence discovering itself through having become matter - one could not be conscious without a body. As you inhale, think of the fact that your body gains awareness due to your consciousness, and that the essential features of this body will extract themselves from their support system, like perfume from a flower, and, thus sublimated survive the limitations of that body.¹

Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan
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