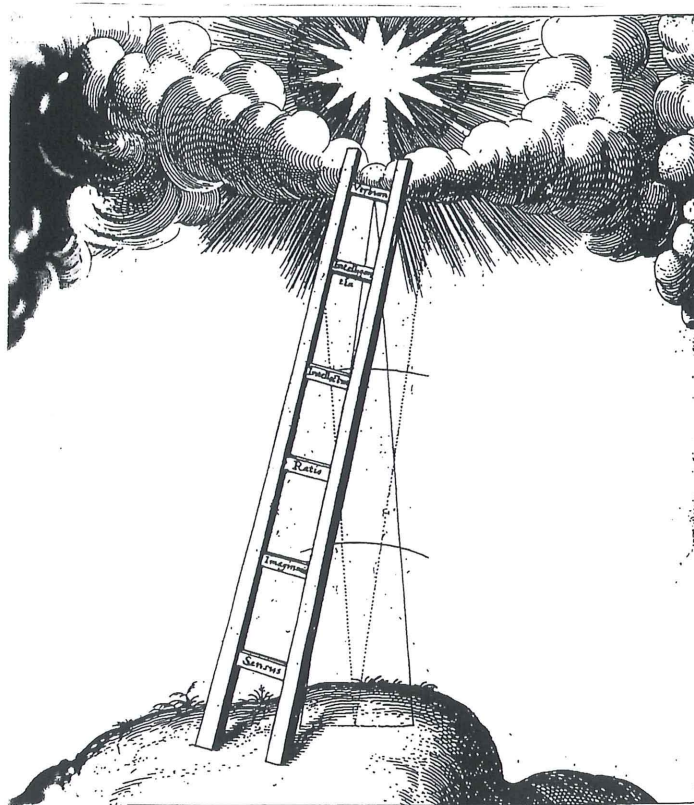


THE MYSTIC LADDER

Parallel Levels of Consciousness in
ALCHEMY & TANTRA

by Lanier Graham



Architecture of Awareness

A Journal of Consciousness Studies

1999

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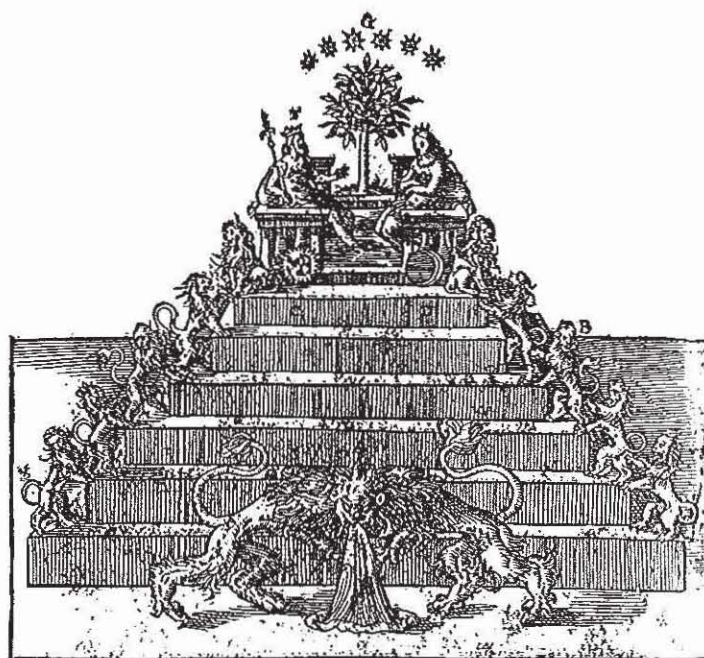
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The double-headed green lion in the foreground is spewing out the solvents on which the Work is based. The seven steps symbolize the alternating phases of dissolution (left) and coagulation (right). At the top sit King Sulphur and Queen Mercury in the chymical bath, from which grows the tree with the golden apples of the Hesperides. Above them are the six stars of the multiplicatio.

A. Libavius,
Alchymia, Frankfurt, 1606



The Seven Steps of The Mystic Ladder of Alchemy
from Libavius, *ALCHYMIA*, Frankfurt, 1606

Introduction

Alchemy in the West and Tantra in the East have much in common. This is well known to students of comparative religion. Alchemy was (and is) an esoteric tradition within Christianity. Tantra was (and is) an esoteric tradition within both Hinduism and Buddhism. Alchemy and Tantra are both contemplative systems, meditative systems. Less well known is the fact that “stages of consciousness” as described in both systems also have a good deal in common. In both there are different ways of numbering the “levels of awareness” up through which one moves on the way to Enlightenment. Some say the levels are 4; some say 5; some say 6. The most common number in both Alchemy and Tantra is 7. This parallel is remarkable. How is this possible? Could it be that both traditions have detected the same deep structure in the primal human architecture of awareness? To find an answer one must work through a dense forest of metaphors, and a complicated set of experiences.

In Tantra, verbal and visual symbols for each stage have been codified for centuries. One does not find the same level of consistency in European Alchemy. Asian teachers of Tantra often have been part of stable monastic situations. Teachings were usually transmitted in a consistent manner, with each stage of progress often being marked by robe color changes and sometimes by public rituals. In Europe, Alchemists usually worked outside the mainstream of spiritual practice, often alone or in very small groups. The evidence indicates that “transmission” from teacher to student took place secretly, away from the eyes of The Church.

Under these conditions, the European masters were highly individualistic. They seem to have been as different from one another as are shamans in personality, and in their use of verbal metaphors and visual metaphors. Nevertheless, a survey of Alchemical literature and visual art indicates there has been a core of consistency in the Alchemical tradition.

The sources for the information in the following portfolio of images and words are well known Alchemical books of the 17th century (the Golden Age of Alchemical book illustration) and from studies by 20th century authors whose books are standard references.

The Tantric image at the end of this introduction is from a book by Lama Anagarika Govinda, FOUNDATIONS OF TIBETAN MYSTICISM. The essays on chakras in Tantra is from the Shambhala ENCYCLOPEDIA OF EASTERN RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY. This encyclopedia suggests reading Lama Govinda for more information on the chakras. Lama Govinda had a deep understanding of both Tantra and Alchemy. Few Tantric masters are more widely read in the West. He was raised in Germany before he went to Tibet, and was involved with Alchemy before turning to Tantric Buddhism. So he was uniquely qualified to discuss both traditions. It is no accident that he is featured in two of the best known modern books on Alchemy by S. K. de Rola and Titus Burckhardt.

Lama Govinda was the teacher of de Rola, who records their relationship in ALCHEMY: THE SECRET ART. In 1975 in Paris I met with Vincent Stuart who published the first English edition of Burckhardt's book, ALCHEMY: SCIENCE OF THE COSMOS, SCIENCE OF THE SOUL, in London in 1967. At the suggestion of Sam Burckholtz, we were considering for Shambhala Publications a sequel to my RAINBOW BOOK which I would write under the title SACRED VISIONS: A SURVEY OF SYMBOLS IN WORLD RELIGIONS. We discussed the important debt of Burckhardt and de Rola to the East/West vision of Lama Govinda.

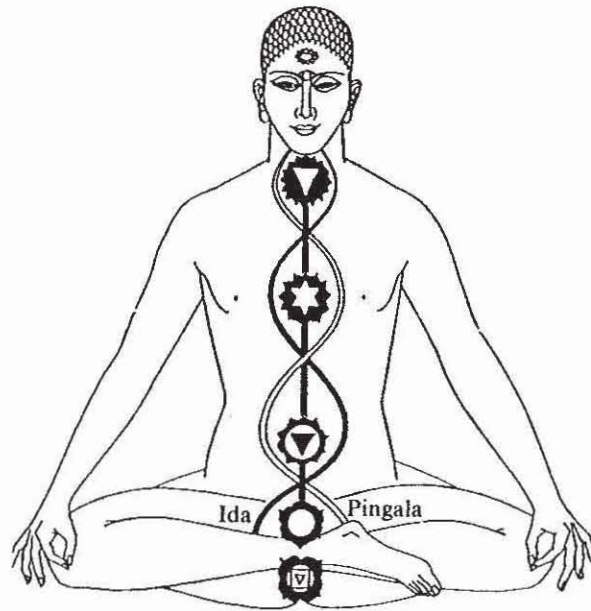
Lama Govinda also was my teacher. I began to study Alchemy during the 1950s, under the guidance of my godfather, A. B. B. MacLeMore. I was encouraged to continue this study by Professor Rudolf Wittkower at Columbia University during the 1960s. My study and practice of Tantra under the guidance Lama Govinda and then Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche began during the 1970s.

It was at Trungpa's invitation that I taught "Sacred Art, East & West" at the Naropa Institute (now Naropa University) in 1976. It was for that class that I prepared the first version of this study guide. There have been a number of revisions since then for students at the California Institute of Asian Studies, the University of California/Berkeley, and Humboldt State University. The core concept has remained the same: an introduction to the parallels. Students will learn more from reading the authors cited here, and much more from meditative experience.

L.G.
Kent Cottage, Brentwood
January 1999



The *Chakras* & the paths of the Serpent Power.



Chakra चक्र (cakra), Skt., lit. wheel, circle; 1. in Hinduism a circle of worshipers.

2. Term for the centers of subtle or refined energy (→ *prāṇa*, → *kundalinī*) in the human energy body (astral body). They concentrate, transform, and distribute the energy that streams through them. Though chakras have correspondences on the coarse, bodily level (for example, heart or solar plexus), these correspondences are not identical with them but belong to another level of phenomenal reality. The chakras are

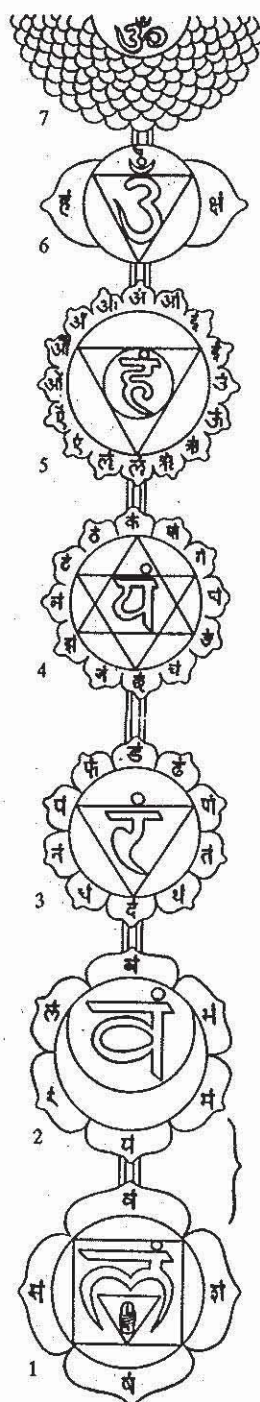


Diagram of the chakras with their most important symbols

points where soul and body connect with and interpenetrate each other. The seven principal chakras of Indian → kundalinī-yoga (these centers are known under other names in other cultures) lie along the → *sushumnā*, the principal channel of subtle energy, located in the spinal column, through which kundalinī rises in the course of spiritual awakening. The first six chakras are located within the coarse body and the seventh outside of it above the crown of the head. When the kundalinī is aroused, which is generally brought about by the special practices of a yoga based on this system, it rises from the first, i.e., lowest, chakra, activating one chakra after the other, up to the seventh and highest. In every chakra to which the yogi brings the kundalinī, he experiences a particular kind of bliss (*ānanda*), acquires a particular psychic power (→ *siddhī*), and realizes a particular form of knowledge. Thus the chakras are also known as centers of consciousness (*chaitanya*). From each chakra radiate a specific number of energy channels (→ *nāḍī*).

Mediumistically gifted persons who can see the human astral body describe the chakras as "lotus blossoms" with varying numbers of petals; this is the way they are traditionally depicted in illustrations. The number of petals of a given chakra corresponds to the number of *nāḍīs* radiating from it. These "lotus blossoms" are in circular motion, hence the impression of a wheel (for example, a whirling wheel of fire) and the name *chakra*. According to the system of kundalinī-yoga each chakra corresponds to specific psychophysical properties, which are expressed through various symbols (shapes, colors, mantric syllables, animal symbols, divinities, etc.). The seven principal chakras and their most important attributes are as follows.

(1) *Mūlādhāra-chakra*. It is located at the lowest part of the *sushumnā* between the root of the genitals and the anus. In the *mūlādhāra-chakra* (in the unawakened state), the kundalinī, which is depicted as a coiled snake (whence the epithet "serpent power"), reposes, providing power and energy to the other chakras. Four *nāḍīs* radiate from this chakra, representing the four petals of the lotus. The symbolic shape is a square, its color is yellow, the associated seed syllable is *lam*, the animal symbol is an elephant with seven trunks, and the divinities are → Brahmā and Dākinī, Brahmā's → *shakti*.

The yogi who by spiritual practice penetrates to the *mūlādhāra-chakra* conquers the quality of earth (*prithivī-tattva*) and no longer fears

bodily death. Concentrating and meditating on this chakra, he attains "complete knowledge of kundalinī and thus the means to arouse it. Arousing it, he receives the *darduri-siddhi*, the power to levitate and to control breath, consciousness, and seed. His *prāna* enters the central *brahma-nāḍī*. His sins are wiped away. He knows past, present, and future and enjoys natural bliss (*sahaja-ānanda*)" (trans. from German edition of Sivananda 1935).

(2) *Svādhishthana-chakra*. It lies in the energy channel *sushumnā* at the root of the genitals. It corresponds to *bhuvārloka*, and its bodily correspondence is the *plexus hypogastricus*, which controls the inner organs of elimination and procreation. From its center radiate six *nāḍīs*, or petals. The symbolic shape is the half-moon, its color is white, the seed syllable is *vam*, the animal symbol is the crocodile, the associated deities are → Vishnu with the lesser divinity Rākinī as shakti.

"One who concentrates and meditates on the *devatā* has no fear of water and completely masters the water element. He acquires various psychic powers, intuitive knowledge, complete mastery of his senses, and knowledge of the astral essences. Desire, wrath, greed, deception, pride, and other impurities are wiped away. The yogi becomes victorious over death [→ *mṛtyuñjaya-siddhi*]" trans. from *ibid.*

(3) *Manipūra-chakra*. It lies within the energy channel *sushumnā* in the navel region. The corresponding bodily center, the solar plexus, controls liver, stomach, and so on. From this chakra radiate ten *nāḍīs*, the petals of this lotus. The symbolic shape is the triangle, its color is red, the seed syllable is *ram*, the animal symbol is the ram, the ruling deities are → Rudra and → Lākinī.

"The yogi who concentrates on this chakra attains *sātala-siddhi* and is able to find hidden treasures. He is freed of all diseases and knows no fear of fire. "Even if he were thrown into a blazing fire, he would remain alive and without fear of death." (*ibid.*)

(4) *Anāhata-chakra*. It lies in the heart region within the *sushumnā* energy channel. The bodily center corresponding to it is the *plexus cardiacus*, which controls the heart. From this chakra radiate fifteen *nāḍīs*, the petals of this lotus. The symbolic shape is the double-triangle star, its color is grayish blue, the seed syllable is *yam*, the animal symbol the gazelle, the ruling deities → Īsha and Kākinī.

"In this center, the sound *anāhat* [→

anāhata-shabda], the sound of → *shabda-brahman*, is evident. One perceives it very distinctly when one concentrates on this center. Whoever meditates on this center completely masters the *vāyu-tattva* (quality of air), which is full of *sattvas* (harmonious properties). He can fly through the air and enter the bodies of others (*bhūhari-siddhi*, *kechāri-siddhi*, *kajā-siddhi*). Cosmic love and other divine qualities come to him" (*ibid.*).

(5) *Vishuddha-chakra*. It lies in the *sushumnā nāḍī* at the lower end of the throat and is the center of the ether element. From this chakra, which corresponds to the bodily center, *plexus laryngeus*, radiate sixteen *nāḍīs*, the petals of this lotus. The symbolic shape is the circle, its color is white, the seed syllable is *ham*, the animal symbol an elephant with six tusks, the ruling deities are Sadā-Shiva and the goddess Shākinī.

"Concentration on the qualities (*tattva*) of this chakra is called *ākāshi-dhāranā*. One who practices this concentration will not perish even with the destruction of the cosmos (→ *pralaya*), for he attains complete knowledge of the four Vedas. He becomes a *trikāla-jñāni* [→ *trikāla-jñāna*] and knows past, present, and future" (*ibid.*).

(6) *Ājñā-chakra*. It lies in the *sushumnā nāḍī* and has its physical correspondence in the space between the eyebrows. In Western esoteric systems this chakra is known as the "third eye." This lotus has two petals, i.e., it has two *nāḍīs* radiating from its middle. Its color is milky white, the seed syllable is short *a*, the associated deities are Parama-Shiva in the form of → Hamsa and the goddess Hākinī. This chakra, the corresponding physical center of which is the *plexus cavernus*, is regarded as the seat of consciousness.

"One who concentrates on this chakra destroys all karma from previous lives. Thus the benefits of such meditation, which transforms the yogi into a *jīvanmukti* (→ *jīvanmukta*), one liberated in this lifetime, are indescribably significant. The yogi acquires all the higher and the thirty two lesser *siddhis*" (*ibid.*).

(7) *Sahasrāra-chakra*. This chakra is located above the crown of the head, thus outside the coarse body, above the upper end of the *sushumnā*. As the name of the chakra indicates, this lotus has a thousand petals, that is, a thousand, or countless, *nāḍīs* radiate from it. The physical correspondence of the *sahasrāra-chakra* is the brain, its seed syllable is *om*, the sacred

utterance (→ *pranava*). The fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet run twenty times around the thousand petals of this lotus so that this lotus blossom represents the totality of all seed syllables and all chakras, which the *sahasrāra-chakra*, set above all the other chakras, encompasses. It radiates light "like ten million suns" and belongs to a higher level of reality than the other six chakras, which as the six chakras (*shat-chakra*), constitute the chakras in the narrower sense of the word.

The *sahasrāra-chakra*, which is regarded as the abode of the god Shiva, corresponds to cosmic consciousness. "If the kundalinī is unified with the god Shiva in the *sahasrāra-chakra*, the yogi experiences supreme bliss (→ *paramānanda*), superconsciousness, and supreme knowledge. He becomes a → *brahmavid-varishta*, a perfect *jñāni*" (ibid.).

A detailed exposition of the chakras and their many aspects according to the teaching of kundalinī-yoga can be found in Arthur Avalon's *The Serpent Power* (see Woodroffe 1919).

Although developed by Hinduism, the system of the chakras also plays a role in Buddhism, especially Tantric Buddhism (→ *Tantra*, → *Vajrayāna*, → *Tibetan Buddhism*). In basic outline the system of energy centers (chakras) and connecting channels (*nāḍī*) is the same as in kundalinī-yoga. The symbolism connected with it, however, is taken from Buddhist iconography, and the meditation practice based on it is significantly different in many respects from that of kundalinī-yoga. An exposition of Buddhist chakra-yoga can be found in Govinda 1959.

Chakrabandha 𑖅𑖥𑖫𑖪 (Cakrabandha), Skt.; a state in which all the → *chakras* are activated, thereby enabling the → *kundalinī* to rise to the seventh center of subtle energy (*sahasrāra*) and thus bring about illumination.

Chakravartin 𑖅𑖥𑖫𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪 (cakravartin) Skt., lit. "wheel ruler"; a ruler of whom it is said, "the wheels of his chariot roll unobstructedly everywhere," a world ruler. Four types of *chakravartin* are distinguished, symbolized by wheels of gold, silver, copper, and iron. *Chakravartin* later became an epithet for a buddha whose teaching is universal and whose truth is applicable to the entire cosmos.

Chakugo 𑖅𑖥𑖫𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪 Jap. → *jakugo*

Chamatkāra 𑖅𑖥𑖫𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪 (Camatkāra), Skt., lit. "astonishment"; a term referring to the uncommon or

unusual, especially that which lies beyond the realm of the senses and thought; that which belongs to the realm of subtle consciousness and is revealed only through intuition.

Ch'an 𑖅𑖥𑖫𑖪 Chin. for → *Zen*

Chañchala 𑖅𑖥𑖫𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪 (Cañcala), Skt., from *cañc*: "to hop, spring, flicker"; unsteady, unreliable, inconstant. The term refers to our usual un-governed thought processes, which flit restlessly from one object to another, constantly misleading us and putting us in a state of agitation.

In the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* → *Arjuna* says to Krishna, "The mind is verily restless, turbulent, strong, and obstinate, and as difficult to control as the wind" (6.34).

Chandas 𑖅𑖥𑖫𑖪, or Chhandas, Skt.; one of the six → *Vedāngas*, the science of prosody. It is concerned not only with the number and length of syllables but also with their "weight," that is, the value ascribed to any particular syllable.

An important authority on this subject was → *Pingalā*, author of the *Chandaś-Sūtra* ("manual of prosody"). For a long time, the teachings of the → *Vedas* were transmitted orally; therefore, each syllable was treated with great attention so that it might be impressed deeply into the student's memory. The teachings were ultimately written down.

Chandī 𑖅𑖥𑖫𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪 (Caṇḍī), Skt.; a sacred text in which the Divine Mother (→ *Shakti*) is described as "ultimate reality"; part of the *Shakta-Tantra*, it consists of thirteen chapters.

Chāndogya-Upaniṣad 𑖅𑖥𑖫𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪 Skt.; the "secret lesson of the Chāndogya school" is the second-oldest of the → *Upanishads* and belongs to the *Sāmaveda*. It presents the fundamental principles of → *Vedānta*, in particular the nature of one's true self (→ *ātman*), and contains the great precept → *Tat tvam asi* ("That thou art").

The work is made up of eight chapters that offer a wealth of ideas regarding the origin of the cosmos, the universal soul and the individual soul, and life in the afterworld. It also contains the famous conversation between the sage → *Uddālaka Āruṇi* and his son → *Shvetaketu* on cosmic unity, that is, the teaching that existence is in everything and that the universe is everywhere permeated by the Absolute.

Chandrakīrti 𑖅𑖥𑖫𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪 → *Mādhyaṃika*

Chandra-Nāḍī 𑖅𑖥𑖫𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪 (Candra-Nāḍī), Skt., lit. "channel of lunar energy"; an epithet for the → *idā*.

Chandrayama 𑖅𑖥𑖫𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪𑖩𑖪 (Candrayama), Skt.; a religious vow whereby one's food intake is decreased or increased according to the waning or waxing of the moon (*chandra*).

PORTFOLIO OF PLATES

Stages of Consciousness in the Tantric System

A Diagram by Lanier Graham
after Lama Govinda

CHAKRAS	Physical Points	Element

Lower Stages		
Muladhara	Above the anus	Earth
Svadisthana	Genitals	Water
Manipura	Solar Plexus	Fire

Higher Stages		
Anahata	Heart	Air
Vishuddha	Throat	Ether
Ajna	Between eyebrows	
Sahasrara	Brain	

NOTE: Lama Govinda had a deep understanding of both Tantra and Alchemy. No Tantric master is more widely read in the West. It is no accident that he is cited in the two best-known surveys of Alchemy, both of which were written by authors who understood both symbol systems. He was the teacher of S. K. de Rola, who mentions him in his book as teacher and friend, p.21. Burckhardt reproduced a drawing of the chakras of the Avalon-Govinda type in his book, p.132. The Avalon image from THE SERPENT POWER, and Lama Govinda's image (which is essentially the same body-image diagram) are the best-known chakra diagrams in Western literature. When I met Vincent Stuart, who published Burckhardt's book in 1967, we discussed Burckhardt's debt to Lama Govinda. Lama Govinda also was my teacher. I studied under him from 1974 to 1979. His verbal and visual articulations of the meanings of the chakra system are particularly clear.

Stages of Consciousness in the Alchemical Process

A Diagram by Lanier Graham
after Titus Burckhardt

MATERIA PRIMA (unclarified) Mercury

		LESSER WORK Spiritizing the Body Ascent of the Soul
Putrefaction	Saturn/lead	♄
Sublimation	Jupiter/tin	♃
Solution	Moon/silver	♁
		GREATER WORK Embodying the Spirit Descent of the Spirit
Crystalization	Venus/copper	♀
Coagulation	Mars/iron	♂
Completion	Sun/gold	☉

MATERIA PRIMA (clarified)

Stages of Consciousness in the Alchemical Process

An outline by Lanier Graham after Gareth Roberts, THE MIRROR OF ALCHEMY, 1994

GENERAL AGREEMENT AMONG THE NUMEROUS SOURCES,
MANY OF WHICH RECORD STAGES OF DIFFERENT
NUMBERS & NAMES FOR THE VARIOUS STAGES, p.57:

Putrification or breaking-down

Separation

White Elixir (which can transmute metals into silver)

Red Elixir (which can transmute metals into gold)

Augmentation of the Red Elixir

Transmutation

Stages given by
ALBERTUS MAGNUS, p.59:

- 1 breaking-down
- 2 sublimation
- 3 fixation
- 4 calcination
- 5 solution
- 6 distillation
- 7 coagulation

Stages given by
MICHELSPACHER, p.44:

- calcination
- sublimation
- solution
- putrefaction
- distillation
- coagulation
- tincture

NOTE: Roberts is correct in pointing out the wide diversity of terms, numbers, and colors used to describe the stages of the process. Alchemy has never been a tradition of fixed dogmas. Each practitioner usually has found the way alone, and often recalls each stage experienced with personal metaphors. Nevertheless, most modern scholars (including Roberts) regard seven as the most common number of stages described by the traditional writers.

Stages of Consciousness in the Alchemical Process

An outline by Lanier Graham after S. K. de Rolla, ALCHEMY: THE SECRET ART

Materia Prima ("Single & Indestructible")

.....

Separation

Nigredo

ends with the appearance of "stars", glistening like the night sky,
& then the Peacock's Tail [or "rainbow" of colors]

Albedo/whiteness

Rosa Alba/White Rose

The Stone

Stages of Consciousness in the Alchemical Process

An outline by Lanier Graham after a plate in Michelspacher, CABALA, 1616

1. CALCINATION
2. SUBLIMATION
3. SOLUTION
4. PUTREFACTION
5. DISTILLATION
6. COAGULATION
7. TINCTURE

These are the seven steps which the unseeing seeker must climb up to the Temple of the Sun & Moon inside the Magic Mountain. Guided by the Seven planetary deities, the seeker can attain the consciousness of the Crowned Phoenix, Illumination.

This bird is standing on the roof of the Temple of the Sun & Moon with one foot on each side of the apparent duality. Resolving twoness into nonduality is the precondition of Illumination.



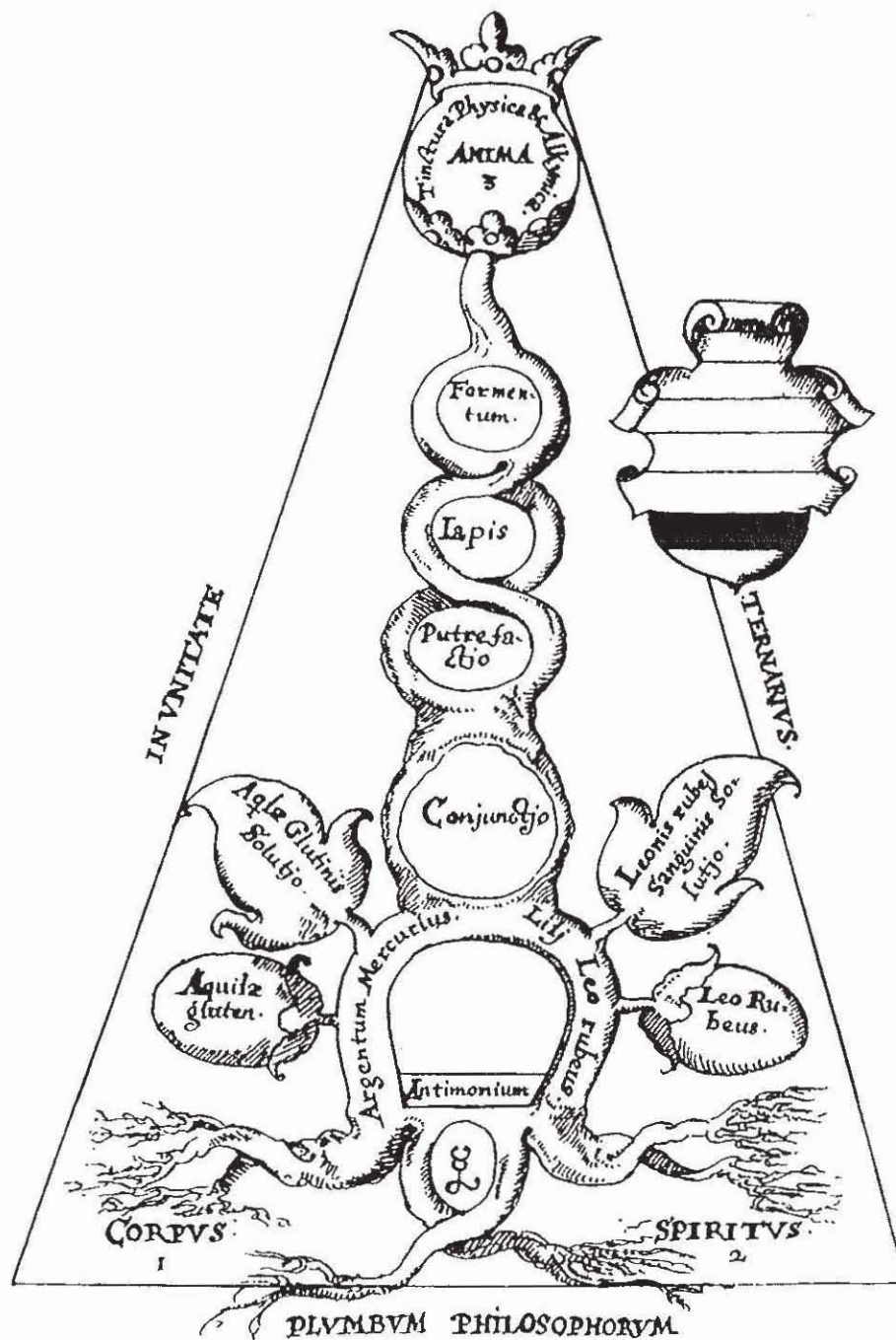
Stages of Consciousness in the Alchemical Process

A diagram by Lanier Graham after a translation of Ripley, MARROW OF ALCHEMY, c1650

[MERCURY]
CONJUNCTIO
PUTREFACTO
LAPIS
FORMENTUM
TINCTURE
[CROWN]

Tantric Parallels:
MULADHARA
SVADISHTHANA

ANAHATA
VISUDDHA
AJNA
SAHASRARA



Stages of Consciousness in the Alchemical Process

A diagram by Lanier Graham after Saint-Didier, TRIOMPHE HERMETIQUE, 1689+1795

Tantric Parallels:

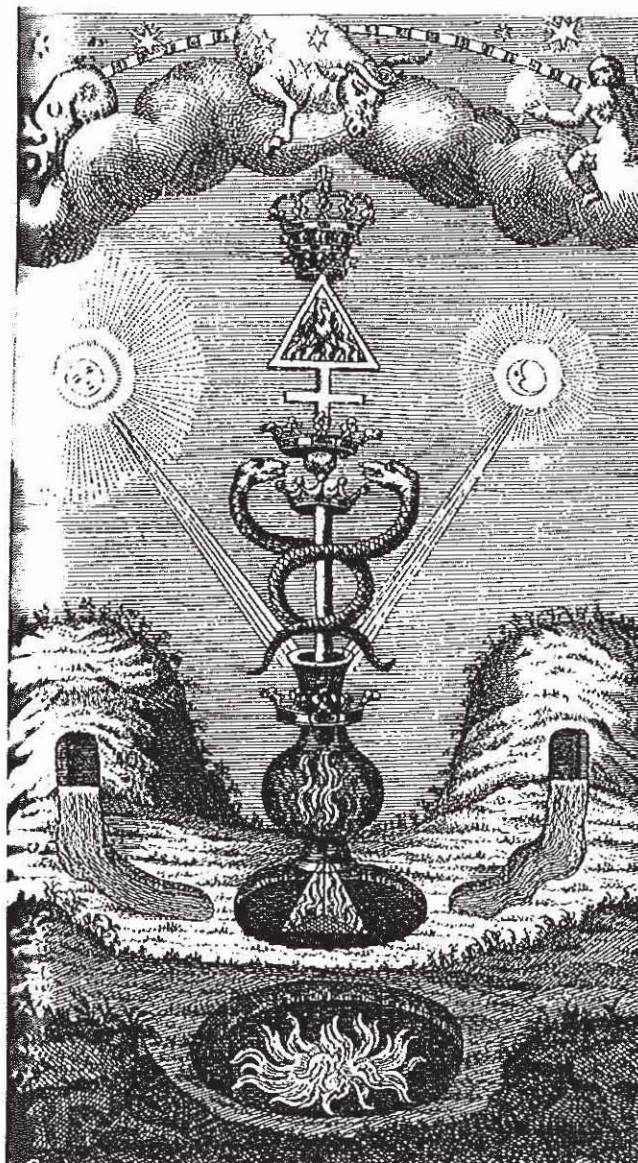
Fire under Earth
Fire above Earth
Fire contained
Double-Serpent

Single-Crown

Double-Crown

Triple-Crown

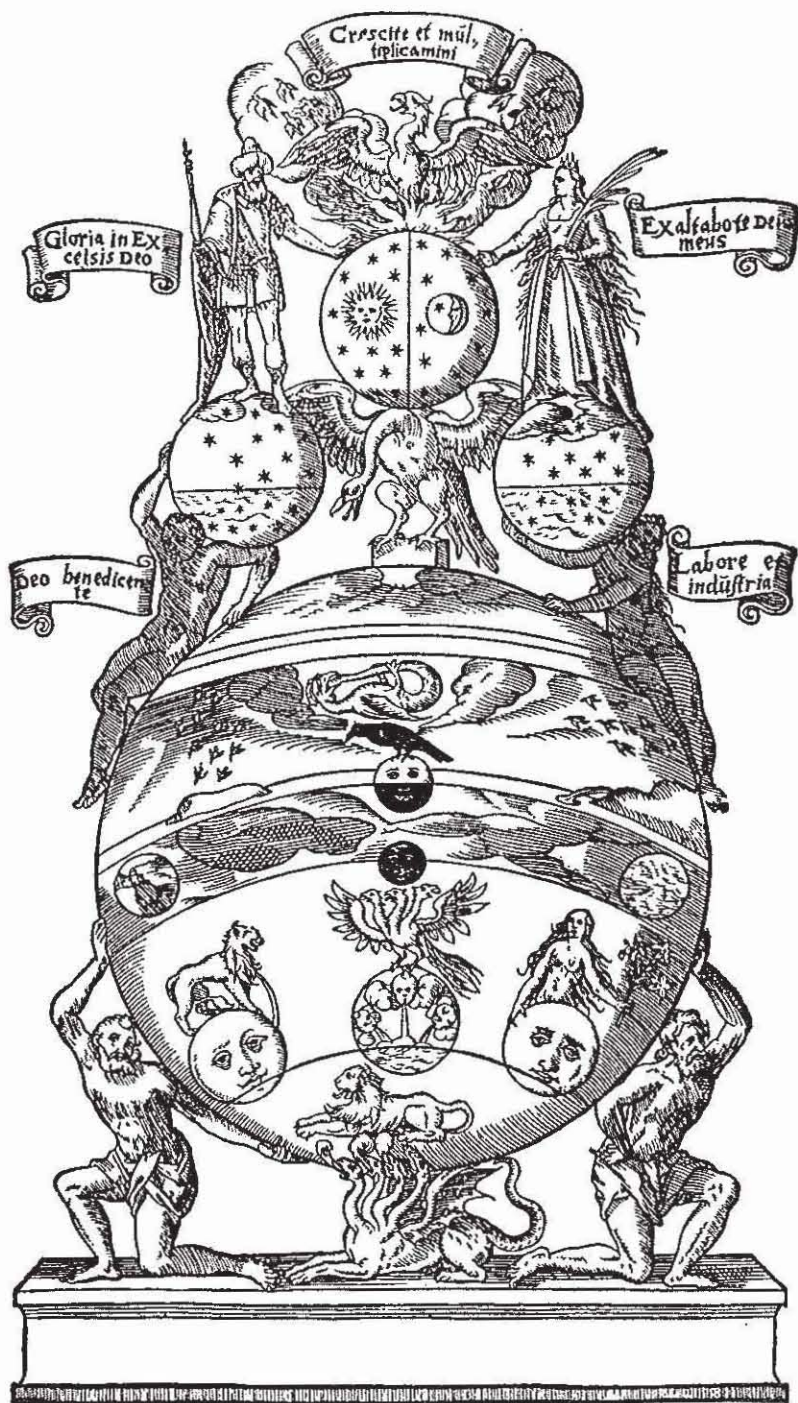
Muladhara
Svadisthana
Manipura
Anahata
Vishuddha
Ajni
Sahasrara



Stages of Consciousness in the Alchemical Process

A diagram by Lanier Graham after Libavius, COMMENTARIORUM ALCHYMIAE, 1606

GREEN LION
THREE-HEADED EAGLE
BLACK CROW or RAVEN
WINGED DRAGON or COCKERAL
WHITE SWAN
KING-QUEEN or SUN-MOON
PHOENIX



Stages of Consciousness in the Alchemical Process

A diagram by Lanier Graham after a print by Matthieu Merian in
Mylius, OPUS MEDICO-CHYMICUM, 1618

BLACK CROW or RAVEN

WHITE SWAN

WINGED DRAGON or COCKEREL

PELICAN

PHOENIX

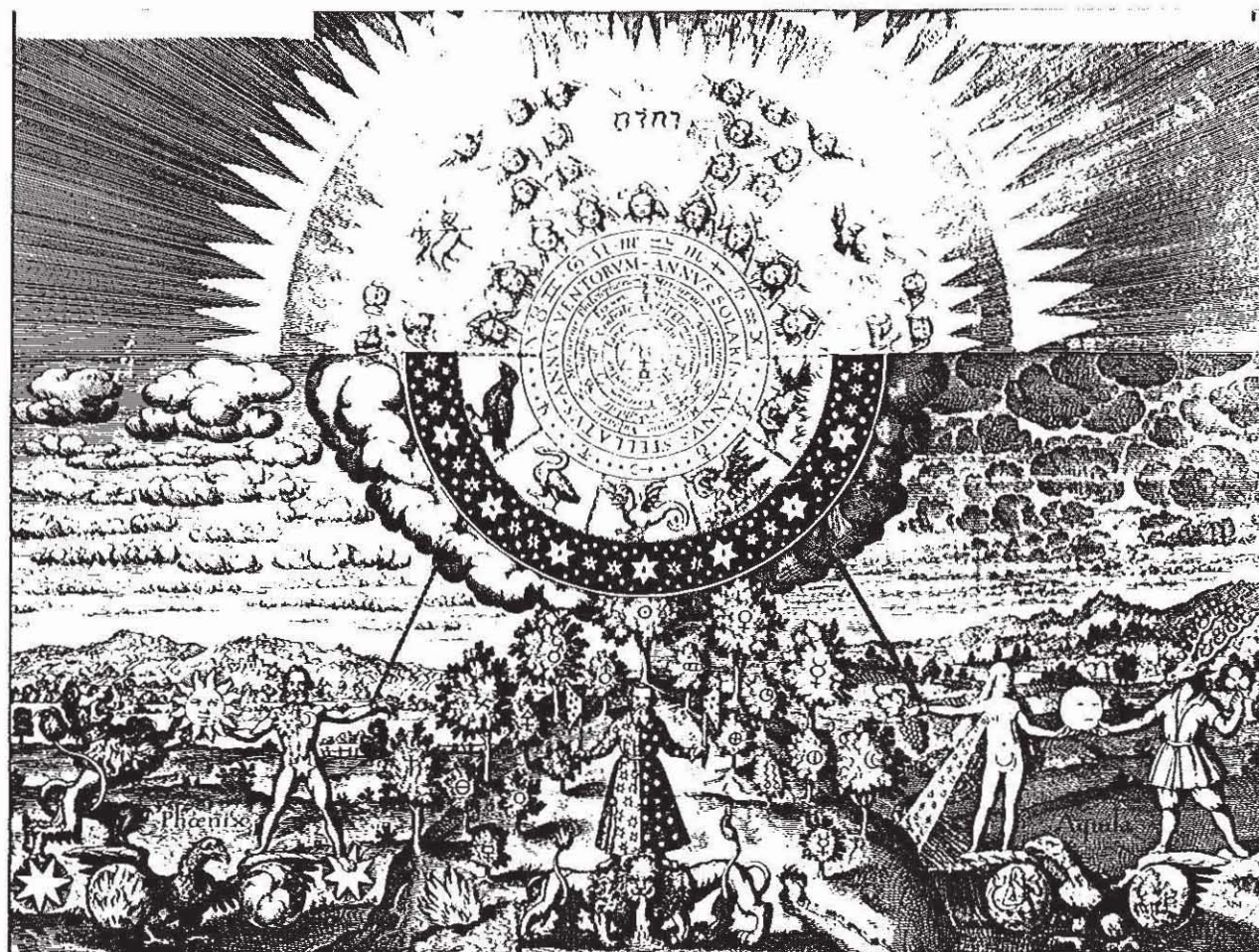
Nigredo, the Blackening

Albedo, the Whitening

Solve [of body] et Coagula [of spirit]

Sacrifice

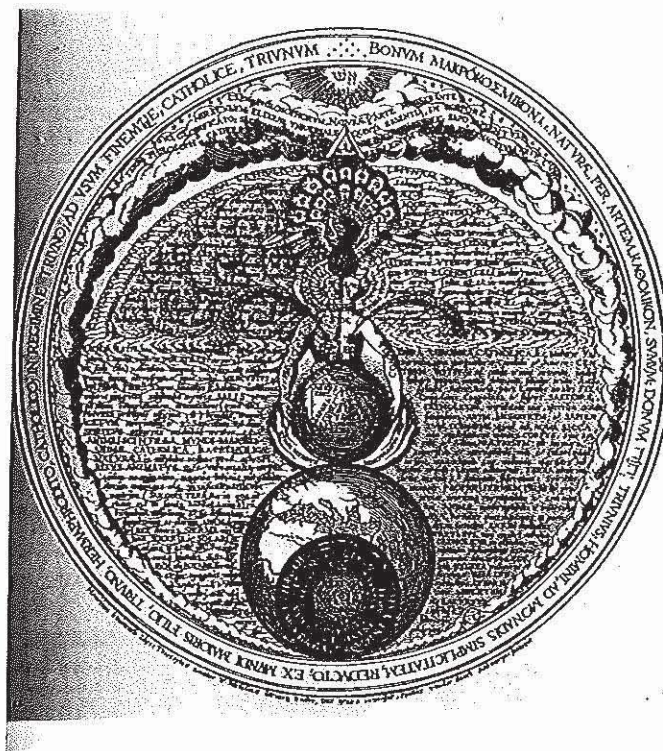
Rubedo, Illumination, the Resurrection



Stages of Consciousness in the Alchemical Process

Caption by Lanier Graham (after Roob) for the "Cosmic Eye" print in Khunrath, AMPHITHEATRUM SAPIENTIAE AETERNAE, 1602

Conceived as the plan view of an eyeball. The dark pupil represents Chaos. The arms raising the New Earth (Philosopher's Stone), from the Old Earth are the two arms of the Androgyne, that is, "the two major parts of the Work, the dissolution of the body [*solve*] and the hardening of the spirit [*coagula*]". Red & White Waters (the twofold aspects of matter) pour from the breasts of the Androgyne. Together, these two Waters form the viscose, "the vitreous body of the cosmic eye, the sea of time and space. The bird represents the phases of the Work. It is composed of the raven (putrefaction), the swan (albedo), the peacock (phase of bright colors), and the phoenix (rubedo)". In other words, in this very concise image of The Mystic Ladder, the traditional "birds of the craft" have been compressed into one bird.



ALCHEMY: A Bibliography of 20th-century Books in English

Lanier Graham

10th ed. 1998

Part 1. Introductory Studies

BURCKHARDT, Titus

ALCHEMY: SCIENCE OF THE COSMOS, SCIENCE OF THE SOUL

Baltimore: Penguin, 1971 1st ed., 1960; 2nd ed., 1967

An excellent, short introduction to European Alchemy by a leading scholar of the sacred art of the East & the West. Probably the most widely read book on the subject today. A few illustrations.

ROLA, S. K. de

ALCHEMY: THE SECRET ART

London: Thames & Hudson, 1973; NY: Avon Books, 1973

A good, short introduction that has the largest selection of color illustrations of any book on the subject. Written from a global perspective. He also edited in a masterful manner THE GOLDEN GAME [see below, Part 3].

ROBERTS, Gareth

THE MIRROR OF ALCHEMY:

ALCHEMICAL IDEAS & IMAGES IN MANUSCRIPTS & BOOKS

FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

London: The British Library, 1994; Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1994

A fine introduction to European Alchemy, with short profiles of leading practitioners, and many excellent illustrations

Part 2. Intermediate Studies

ELIADE, Mircea

THE FORGE & THE CRUCIBLE

Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago, 1962

An overview of how the symbolism of Alchemy developed from metalworking at the start of the Iron Age, and from the earlier mythology of iron falling from the sky (meteorites). Written by the 20th century's most respected historian of religions. Included are chapters on Alchemy of India and China, and a note on Jung's penultimate understanding of the Alchemical process. The bibliography is the best concise gateway into the regional literature on Alchemy of Europe, Egypt, West Asia, South Asia, & East Asia.

HOLMYARD, E. J.

ALCHEMY

Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957

A classic, concise survey of European Alchemy by a noted scholar who also wrote THE ARABIC WORKS OF JABIR IBN HAYYAN, Paris, 1928, a major study of the famous Arabian Alchemist.

READ, John

PRELUDE TO CHEMISTRY:

AN OUTLINE OF ALCHEMY, ITS LITERATURE & RELATIONSHIPS

London, 1939

An excellent, well-illustrated, historical outline of how European Alchemy developed into modern chemistry.

TAYLOR, F. Sherwood

THE ALCHEMISTS:

FOUNDERS OF MODERN CHEMISTRY

London: Heinemann, 1951 1st ed. New York 1949?

Another good book on the same subject.

Part 3. Advanced Visual Studies

McLEAN, Adam

THE ALCHEMICAL MANDALA:

A SURVEY OF THE MANDALA IN

THE WESTERN ESOTERIC TRADITIONS

Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1989

An examination of a selection of circle-square diagrams in European Alchemy which have relationships with Asian mandalas. Written with considerable sensibility. McLean also maintains a very large and useful Internet website.

ROOB, Alexander

THE HERMETIC MUSEUM:

ALCHEMY & MYSTICISM

Koln, NY, etc.: Taschen, 1997

A large "encyclopedia" of Alchemical images. The largest collection of full-color images published to date, with thoughtful annotations.

ROLA, S. K. de
THE GOLDEN GAME:
ALCHEMICAL ENGRAVINGS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
London: Thames & Hudson, 1988; New York: Braziller, 1988

All the images from many major books are reproduced. A beautiful treasury of instructional images from the Golden Eras of Alchemical books.

Part 4. Books by or about Individual Alchemists

NOTE: The bibliography of these books is extensive. Most editions are rare. A few are available in facsimile editions. The best preliminary bibliography for serious students is in Roberts, OP. CIT. Among the key figures are:

Albertus Magnus
Aquinas
Ashmole
Bacon
Boehme
Dee
Flamel
Gerber
Fludd
Lull
Maier
Mylius
Norton
Paracelsus
Ripley
Valentine

Appendix 1.

Stages of Consciousness in Modern Freemasonry

The Alchemists of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were individuals who worked alone, or with their partners. They did not organize into groups, as a rule. Although most of them were devoted Christians, who used their Alchemical meditations to bring them closer to God, the Church was opposed to their activities. That attitude changed during the 15th & 16th centuries, when Alchemy came to be understood as an acceptable form of prayer, and Alchemical texts were quoted as often as passages from The Bible. During the 17th century, larger groups of practitioners formed. The best known were the Rosicrucians. The Rosicrucian Order still exists and has many members.

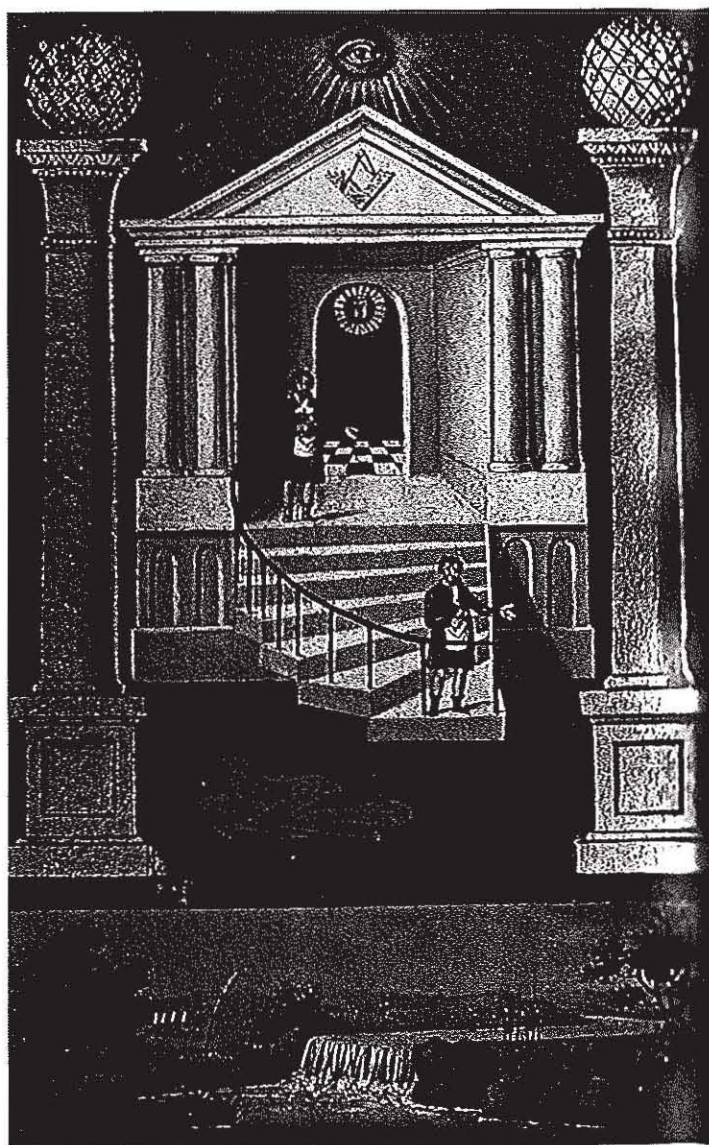
Building on traditional insights of Alchemy, the Freemasonry movement developed into an ethical organization in Europe and the United States where it had, and still has, a powerful influence on social, economic, and political developments. Many of the Founding Fathers of the United States, such as George Washington, John Hancock, and Paul Revere, were Masons. By the end of the 19th century, the American membership was nearing a million men. Masonic Lodges can be found in most of the major cities of the U.S. Its membership often includes many of the leading men of each of these cities. Freemasons of the 18th, 19th, & 20th centuries continued many of the teachings and symbols of Alchemy, including both the image of the Mystic Ladder and the Seven Steps of consciousness. For a concise historical survey of the Masonic movement, and an introduction to the large literature, see the Freemasonry issue of GNOSIS: A JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN INNER TRADITION, Summer 1997.

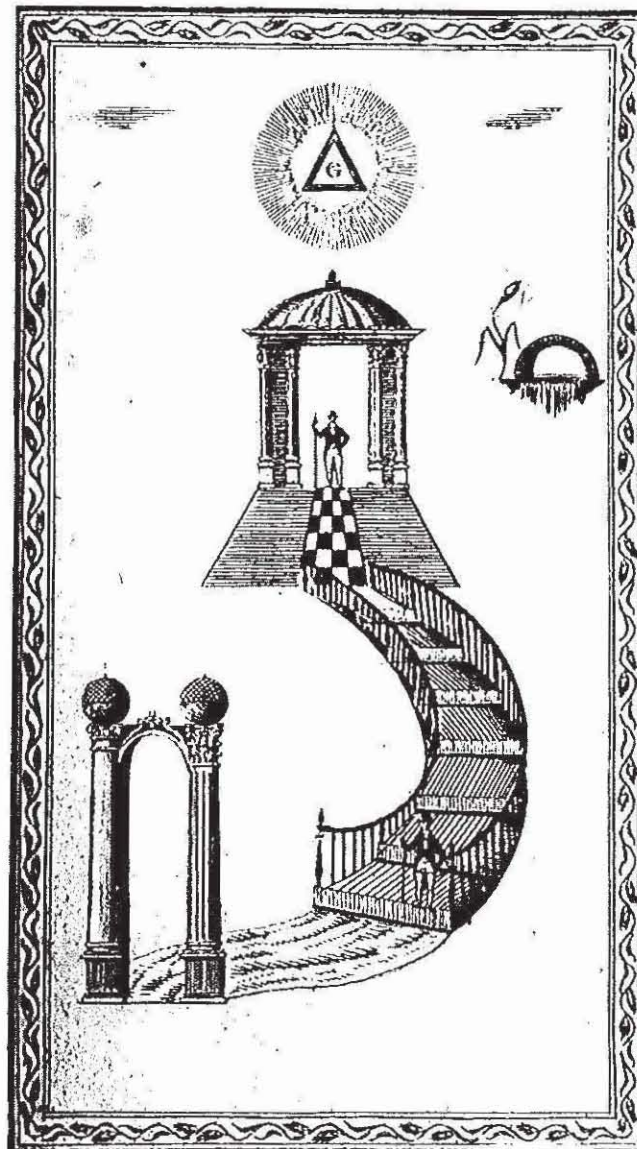
The following plates from late 18th century and early 19th century Masonic manuals have been reproduced from Roob, THE HERMETIC MUSEUM: ALCHEMY & MYSTICISM, 1997, pp.114 & 293-95.

- | | |
|----------|-------------------------|
| Plate 1. | The All-Seeing Eye |
| Plate 2. | Jacob's Ladder |
| Plate 3. | 7-step Spiral Staircase |
| Plate 4. | 7-step Spiral Staircase |

While the ascent on the apprentice board leads straight up a ladder – as an expression of the original will, following a projection – at the more advanced level of the journeyman, what we now have is a curved path in the form of a seven-step spiral staircase, in which it is no longer clear where the beginning and end are. This expresses the slow and organic course of the process of spiritual maturity. One image of this is the ear of corn growing beside the endless river of life.

J. Bowring, Second Degree Board, 1819





The two columns of Jachin and Boas indicate that we are now inside the temple of Solomon. The seven steps symbolize the seven phases of the process, the seven levels of consciousness and the seven liberal arts.

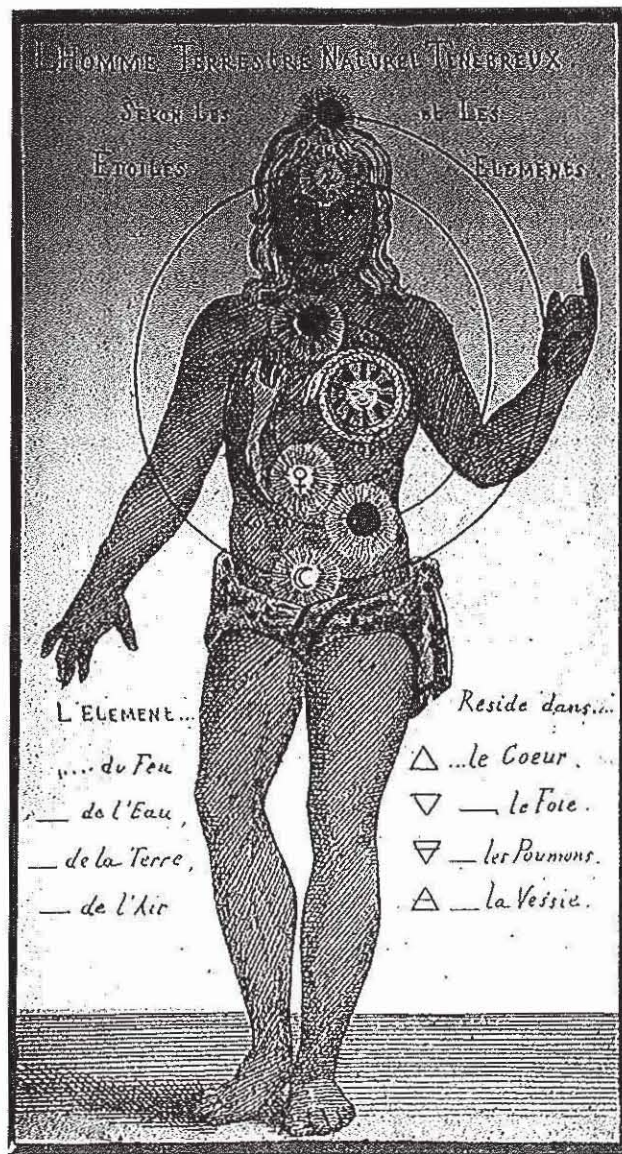
Here, everything still occurs in the side chambers of the temple: the holy of holies at the centre only discloses itself "when One has come of Two" and the portal of death and corruption has been crossed. (cf. p. 223)

*F. Curtis, Work
Chart for the 2nd
Level, 1801*

Appendix 2.

Stages of Consciousness in Modern Theosophy

"Theosophy" means spiritual philosophy. The term has been used by many different esoteric groups over the centuries, notably by Bohme and his many followers. Below is a 17th century illustration from a book by Gichtel showing the position of the seven chakras (which he calls the seven "seals").



Nobody did greater service to the dissemination of Böhme's ideas than the Regensburg writer Georg Gichtel (1638–1710), who was himself devoted to a radical Sophian mysticism, and who, in exile in Amsterdam, surrounded himself with a circle of celibate 'angelic brothers'. In his *Theosophia practica* (1696) he described how the wheel of the planets lies on the body in seven diabolical seals.

G. Gichtel,
*Theosophia
practica*,
1898 edition

This term reminds us of the "Seven Seals" that were opened in St. John the Divine's Book of Revelation. This final Book of the NEW TESTAMENT is filled with metaphorical images of the mystic number 7. Here are 7 churches, 7 candlesticks, 7 "lamps of fire ... which are the seven Spirits of God", the Lamb with 7 horns and 7 eyes "which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth". The Lamb, who had made the ultimate sacrifice, could open the book with Seven Seals. The story of the vision is told in Chapters 5 - 8.

When the Seven Seals were opened, they revealed (in order):

	THE SYMBOLS:	RELATED MEANINGS:
1.	White Horse	The Rider the Conquer.
2.	Red Horse	The Rider is the Killer.
3.	Black Horse	The Rider holds a Pair of Balances.
4.	Pale Horse	The Rider is Death.
5.	Martyrs	They died for Christ & were waiting for the rest.
6.	Sun & Moon	Earth is transformed & all are Fearful.
7.	Living God	Salvation & the Sounds of 7 Angels.

Is this a story of the opening of the Seven Levels of Consciousness? The first three colors (white, red, black) are the three basic colors of Alchemy, and also the three colors perceived by those tribal people who perceive only three colors. There follows [Chapters 8 - 11] another story of seven Angels whose trumpet sounds bring forth seven earthly events that lead up to Kingdom Come. Is this another story of the Seven Phases of Consciousness?

	THE SOUNDS:	THE EVENTS:
1.	1st sound	Hail & Fire mixed with blood on Earth.
2.	2nd sound	Earth burning in a bloody Sea.
3.	3rd sound	Burning star falls into Earth's water.
4.	4th sound	Sun & Moon are darkened.
5.	5th sound	Beasts torment the faithless.
6.	6th sound	Angels kill people, but still no repentance.
7.	7th sound	The Kingdom Come.

In the last 100 years, the primary association of "theosophy" has been the name of a group organized by Mme. Blavatsky. Her purpose was to teach people in the West the wisdom of the East. The Theosophical Society remains one of the largest esoteric societies of the modern era. Here is an overview of Blavatsky and her Society from Roob, *THE HERMETIC MUSEUM: ALCHEMY & MYSTICISM*, p.430. In her vision, the seven stages of consciousness involve not only the awareness of each individual but the "whole cosmos".

In the emblem of the Theosophical Society, a combination of the western Ouroboros, the eastern Swastika, the Jewish Star of David and the ancient Egyptian Ankh, its syncretic programme is very directly expressed.

The society was founded in New York in 1875 by the Russian emigrant Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–1891), described by W.B. Yeats as a "primeval peasant". In Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, she appears as a hen scratching a mysterious piece of writing from a dung-heap. This is her 'Secret Doctrine', published in three volumes in 1888, a mythical pot-pourri such as is found, for example, in paintings by Max Beckmann, imbued with the spirit of *fin-de-siècle* salon spiritualism.

In 1879 the society moved its main seat to Adyar in India. The

mixture of Eastern spirituality and Western occultism made a decisive contribution to the development of abstract painting. Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian were among the society's devotees.

Her programme of "science, religion and philosophy", which she sought to promulgate with a keen sense of dramatic effect, also makes Madame Blavatsky a herald of the New Age movement of the late 20th century.

According to her theory, the whole cosmos consists of a seven-stage process of evolution and involution. The goal of humanity is the upward development from the sexual, material body to

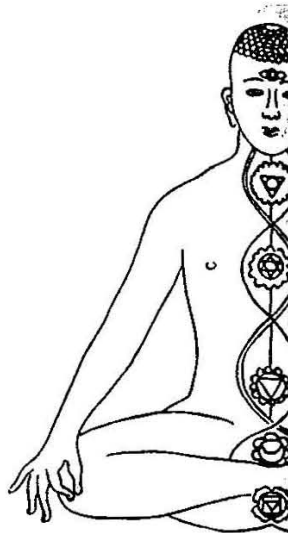
the ethereal, light body. This path leads from the currently dominant Aryan mother-race to a sublimated race of people that she saw emerging in the America of her own time.



Several years after its founding, the world headquarters of the Society moved to Adyar, a suburb of Madras. The present American headquarters is in Wheaton, Illinois. Its purpose was, and remains, the study of all world religions in order to establish a universal ethical code. In the first decades, the primary focus was on Buddhism. After 1894, the focus was closer to Tantric Hinduism. The publications program remains quite active. The Theosophical Society has published more books that illustrate the chakra ladder with more precision than any other esoteric organization. The best-known chakra diagrams were published in Leadbeater's book, *THE CHAKRAS*, 1927, and in Powell's book, *THE ETHERIC DOUBLE*, 1925. The following diagrams from those two books are illustrated as they were reproduced in Lanier Graham, ed., *THE RAINBOW BOOK*, 1975.

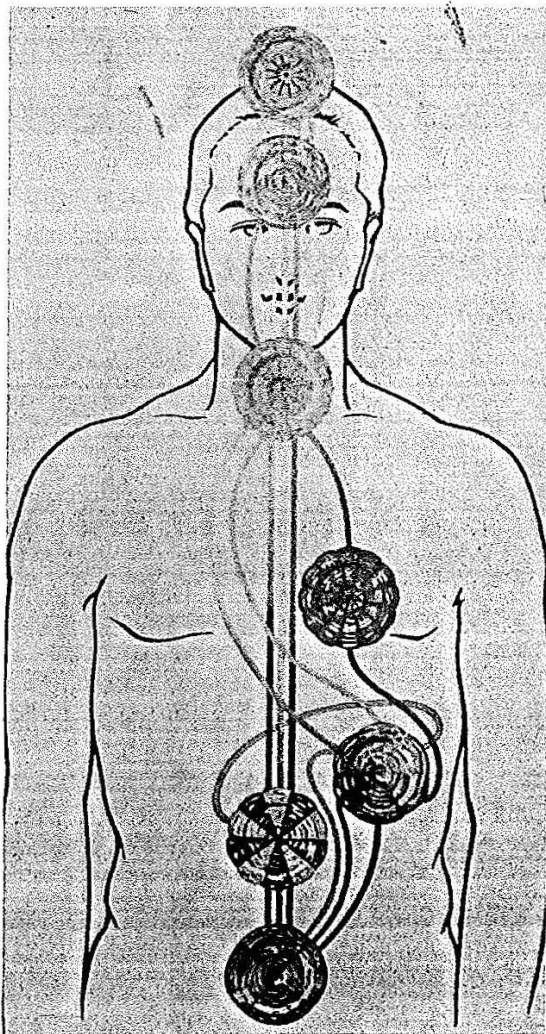
The "Vell" that separates a man-in-ignorance from God Who is All Knowledge, is so subtle that even the highest and finest thought cannot pierce through it. This vell consists of seven folds of seven different, deep colours. Each fold is tied with a separate knot; thus there are seven knots to the seven folds. The seven colours represent the seven root desires, corresponding to the seven fundamental impressions, i.e. lust, greed, anger, etc., connected with the seven openings of sensation in the face, viz. (1) mouth, (2) right nostril, (3) left nostril, (4) right ear, (5) left ear, (6) right eye, (7) left eye.

—Meher Baba, *God Speaks* (1955)



The Chakras by Lama Govinda from Mysticism (1966)

Chakra System from Leadbeater The Chakras (1927)

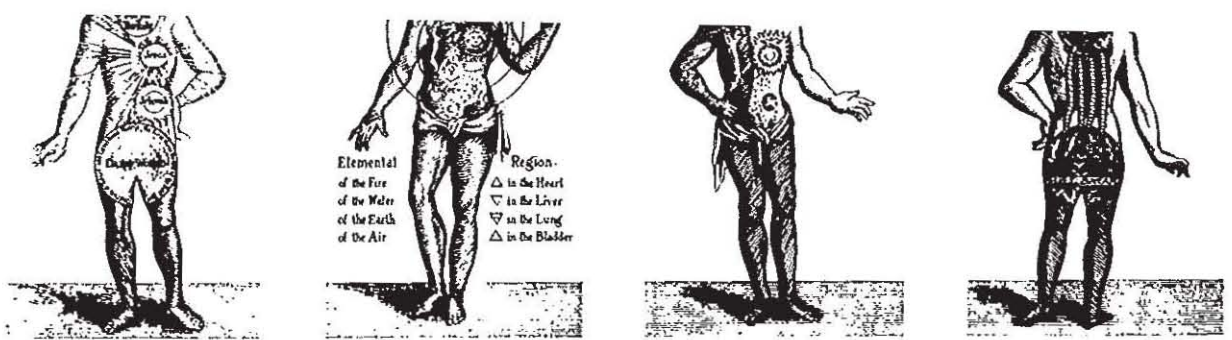


"But does any of this relate ourselves as we pored over matter month. Do any of these of awareness' follow a spectral way through our study, we we that the answer is YES! They could believe in such a thing accept. It was so unlike anything I understand before. Usually, from the literature of 'psychic' that I first read the suggestion of what I read:

It is well to experiment with colors congenial. As we ascend the ladder tally, morally and physically, we find the degree of sensitivity to color and I young woman who was quite physically dressed largely in red and had her a crimson. Later she became a student of her day in the libraries of the city nothing of the psychology of colors she changed the decoration of her home yellows. Still later she became a metaphysical her colors to the softest azure blues. I found student of the occult, and wrote ties. Then it was that she lived, moved the delicate, almost tenuous, New Age

—Corrinne Heline, *Color and*

But as we began to study the were confronted by undeniable system of 'spiritual technology' concept of a 'ladder to Heaven' are the colors of the rainbow.



Redrawn from Gichtel's Theosophia Practica.

THE THREEFOLD LIFE OF THE INNER MAN. ©The Philosophical Research Society, Inc.

Johann Georg Gichtel, a profound philosopher and mystic, the most illumined of the disciples of Jakob Böhme, secretly circulated the above diagrams among a small group of devoted friends and students. Gichtel republished the writings of Böhme, illustrating them with numerous remarkable figures. According to Gichtel, the diagrams above represent the anatomy of the divine (or inner) man, and graphically set forth its condition during its human, infernal, and divine states. The plates in the William Law edition of Böhme's works are based apparently upon Gichtel's diagrams, which they follow in all essentials. Gichtel gives no detailed description of his figures, and the lettering on the original diagrams here translated out of the German is the only clue to the interpretation of the charts.

The two end figures represent the obverse and reverse of the same diagram and are termed Table Three. They are "designed to show the Condition of the whole Man, as to all his three essential Parts, Spirit, Soul, and Body, in his Regenerated State." The second figure from the left is called the Second Table, and sets forth "the Condition of Man in his old, lapsed, and corrupted State; without any respect to, or consideration of his renewing by Regeneration." The third figure, however, does not correspond with the First Table of William Law. The First Table presumably represents the condition of humanity before the Fall, but the Gichtel plate pertains to the third, or regenerated, state of mankind. William Law thus describes the purpose of the diagrams and the symbols upon them: "These three tables are designed to represent Man in his different Threefold State: the First before his Fall, in Purity, Dominion, and Glory; the Second after his Fall, in Pollution and Perdition; and the Third in his rising from the Fall, or on the Way of Regeneration, in Sanctification and Tendency to his last Perfection." The student of Orientalism will immediately recognize in the symbols upon the figures the Hindu chakras, or centers of spiritual force, the various motions and aspects of which reveal the condition of the disciple's internal divine nature.

[Left & below] Chakra system from Leadbeater The Chakras (1927) and Powell, The Etheric Double (1925)

