

Alchemical Medicine Rediscovered



Despite many technological advances, our modern society has so far failed to address the all-important issue of health and harmony, both in the human being and on planet Earth. This situation has led to an increase of interest in the study of holistic medicine and herbal remedies in general. In the meantime, we have also witnessed a genuine interest in rediscovering lost esoteric teachings in various branches of knowledge. Among these esoteric disciplines, one that is going through a major revival is alchemy and its medical applications.

The teaching of alchemy has an age-old tradition that includes a mystical as well as a more practical dimension. Within this practical side we find the study of plant and mineral substances to be used for healing (both physical and psychological) and to increase longevity.

In traditional systems of medicine of both East and West alchemical teachings pervaded their fundamental structures. Thus, whether we study TCM (Traditional Chinese medicine), Ayurveda, homeopathy or spagyric medicine, we encounter many ideas 'borrowed' from alchemical processes and principles. Concepts like: transmutation, regeneration, purification, dissolution, etc., play an important role in the philosophical formulation of these systems of medicine.

In this brief article I am going to focus on the teachings of spagyrics. The term spagyric refers to a branch of plant alchemy which was popularised in medieval Europe by Paracelsus, a Swiss alchemist, physician, astrologer and philosopher. In his teachings he stated that the true purpose of [alchemy](#) was not for the vulgar purpose of making gold, but rather for the production of medicines.

The use of plants for medical and magical purposes is thousands of years old but unfortunately we have nearly lost sight of the metaphysical and sacred dimension of plant healing. Spagyric

medicines are prepared in a unique way that captures the full therapeutic spectrum of plants, including the cosmic energies they constantly absorb. As plants lie constantly under the sky, this mysterious cosmic connection contributes to their healing qualities.

In a general sense we can say that the nourishment for the growth of plants comes from air, soil and water, but the energy for their growth comes from the sun, moon and stars.

Esoterically there is a very important correspondence between the plant kingdom and the energetic level of being (i.e. prana, chi, vital force, etc.). In fact, most of the systems of internal alchemy found in the East (for instance the Tantric and Taoist traditions) are based on the teachings about a subtle body and its energy network. Through spagyric methods 'plant energy' is enhanced and extracted so that it can be used as medicine. As all chronic and recurring conditions may be traced to an energy deficit it is important to understand the relationship between human health and energetic healing.

The primary spagyric methods consist of separating therapeutic herbs into their constituent virtues: essential oil, alcohol and water-soluble salts (electrolytes).

Paracelsus regarded these three virtues as the three philosophical principles or *tria prima* of sulphur, mercury and salt. These are the soul, spirit (i.e. vital force) and body of the plant. The first principle is active and fiery, the second is receptive and watery and the third is fixed and solid.

Through distillation the plant releases the essential oils (sulphur), while the alcohol (mercury) is extracted through fermentation. Calcination of the remaining plant, followed by filtration, leaves the specific water-soluble salts.

In accordance with the spagyric motto: *Solve et Coagula, et habebis magisterium* (dissolve and coagulate and you will have the mastery), after separating this *tria prima*, the three principles are recombined to produce a spagyric essence. Through a process of separation and purification (*solve*), the subtle constituents of the plant are potentiated and then recombined (*coagula*) together. This process stresses the importance of purification of both matter and soul in the path of Hermetic ascent from a lower nature to a higher one

Another important part of the work consists of capturing the cosmic influence mentioned earlier, by starting a particular phase of the work when celestial opportunities are favourable. This stage requires the knowledge of the astrological correspondences and the *doctrine of signatures* or divine seals. In this intricate system of correspondences, planets are identified with metals, days of the week, herbs and parts of the body.

The greatness of alchemy lies in the fact that its doctrines are not the result of dry intellectual knowledge but the product of an applied knowledge capable of bringing tangible results. Reflecting the alchemical motto: pray and work (*Ora et labora*) the alchemist doctor invites us all into the path of practical philosophy or philosophy for living.