



The Alchemist's Path: 50 Spiritual Exercises for Magickal Transformation

By Cherry Gilchrist

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In this inspirational and accessible guide, readers discover how to find the extraordinary in the ordinary. Simple yet powerful, the workbook's exercises show how to understand and apply the transformational powers of alchemy to one's spiritual journey. The practice of alchemy has taken many forms through the ages, inspiring music, medicine, art, psychology, and spirituality. This book explores magickal alchemical processes, symbols, and principles while demonstrating how alchemy can be a part of everyday life. Specially designed exercises including meditations, visualizations, creative cooking, and dance therapy, show people how to turn daily experiences as well as one's self into gold."

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Editorial Review

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Chapter One

Cracking the Egg

This is the moment. You hold the sword in your hand, ready to pierce the egg that stands before you. It is the perfect egg, and the perfect moment to do the deed. Now is your chance to strike.

But it is terrifying to commit yourself to this moment. It is much easier to linger in the past or dream of the future. And the egg is beautiful as it is. If the sword doesn't strike cleanly, you might shatter the shell and damage the precious embryo of life inside it. Wouldn't it be better to leave it alone?

It is your choice, of course. The sword carries your intention, and you must decide whether you will use it to break open the alchemical egg and initiate the process of transformation. The egg may look perfect, but it is as yet undeveloped. From the moment of opening the egg, you must begin the work of developing the raw material it contains through every stage of change until it becomes alchemical gold. The egg will certainly perish if its potential is not released, so the choice cannot be postponed indefinitely. The gold you aspire to, on the other hand, is incorruptible. It is a symbol of enlightenment, the Elixir of Life, the realization of Life beyond life, the Sun behind the sun. It is a place of safety for the human spirit, and an entry point into the divine world.

We can see from this emblem that the moment of impending change is frightening. The act of splitting the egg open will catapult the alchemist into an unknown world; from this moment on, he will be changed. He will have to leave his old life behind. On his face we can read apprehension, and even a hint of terror. But he knows that even though he trembles on the brink, he has to go forward. This chance may only come once in a lifetime.

There is also intense concentration in his expression. The perfect egg could be ruined by one careless slip with the sword. So his act of bravery must be carried out as precisely and skillfully as possible. As the accompanying verse says:

There is a bird, the most sublime of all,
To find whose Egg should be your only care.
Its white surrounds a soft and golden yolk:
One cautiously attacks with fiery sword.
Let Vulcan aid the work of Mars: the chick
Hatched thence will conquer both the iron and the fire.

Setting Out on the Path

Alchemy is about change. Each of us changes?life itself does that to us. Age, environment and experience affect us, altering our appearance and our outlook. Hopefully, we all finish our lives a little wiser than we started. But the work of alchemy makes different demands. It is for those who consciously seek change on a bigger scale?not change for change's sake, but for the growth of the spirit.

Alchemists have always said that there is a right moment to start the "Great Work," and to initiate the alchemical process. They often advised choosing the time through astrology, calculating a moment with favorable planetary influences and at the right point in the lunar cycle. But perhaps more critical is the time that precedes that?the moment of choice, when the decision is made to undertake the work of transformation. Very often this can be triggered by a key event in life. In the sixteenth century, a young man called Jakob Boehme had a mysterious encounter. He was working as a humble and uneducated apprentice in a shoe shop. One day a stranger appeared in the doorway, his eyes burning with an unearthly light. He said: "Jakob, thou

art little, but shalt be great, and become another man, such a one as at whom the world shall wonder." From that day, Jakob became aware of his destiny, and went on to become a famous alchemist and mystic. Was this stranger an angelic messenger? Such dramatic revelations are certainly not granted to everyone.

However, many of us may experience something similar, so that even in ordinary meetings with normal people, words may be spoken that strike us with great power, and which become our divine imperative, urging us to take a different direction.

There may also be events in our lives which bring us to that moment of change. When I was a nineteen-year-old student, my boyfriend and I headed off to America for the summer. We bought an old camper van and decided to drive down through Mexico. One morning after a showery night, we were driving through the hills towards a little town in central Mexico. The surface was slippery and suddenly, as we were rounding a bend, the van skidded and veered towards the edge of the road. Below us was an almost sheer drop down a high earth cliff. I watched the whole process happen, and I remember thinking quite calmly: "This is the last thought that I shall ever have." I felt that it was a shame, but I was not frightened. Then the van plunged over the edge, and I fell with it into a kind of grey limbo. I "woke up" after it had rolled over and over and come to rest at the bottom of the cliff. Miraculously, the two of us were almost unhurt, apart from bruises and minor cuts. But nothing was ever thhhhhe same again.

For several weeks prior to the accident, I had sensed that something very frightening was about to happen, though I had no idea what. I felt that my world?my egg?was about to burst open. I would wake up at night in distress from nightmares, and yet I couldn't say what they were about. I decorated the inside of the van with cut-out stars and colorful cushions to try to make it feel like home, but I could not find any sense of security there. And after the accident, there was no blissful state of relief that I was still alive. In fact, we lived through a horrible period; to begin with, when we climbed back up to the road, no one would stop to help us although we were bleeding. When we finally got to hospital, we were treated and released within a few days, and then we had to live in the little mountain town for weeks while they sorted out our insurance claim because the official at the border had been too drunk to sign our papers. Our travelers' checks had been stolen at the scene of the accident, so our money ran out, and we had to sleep in a hut where rats ran across the floor at night. I began to indulge in a fantasy that we had really died, and that now we were trapped in some kind of curious Otherworld.

By day, everything began to polarize into the good and the bad. There were good, kind people who helped us, fed us, and acted like Good Samaritans. There were also corrupt officials and those too callous to help. And the terror of the accident haunted me, as it did for months to come.

But?and here is the promise of gold among the dross?this event brought me to the most important choice of my life. I had come close to death, and I had to face up to this. I couldn't shelve the "big questions" any more, about life and death and my own place on this planet. Back in the UK, I began attending a meditation class, and soon afterwards I found the particular line of work that I have followed until this day, which is rooted in the Western Hermetic and Kabbalistic tradition. The accident had shattered my world, but it brought new hope and a new way forward.

When the moment is seized, and the egg broken open, there is a real shift in life. It is like becoming a driver instead of a passenger. (Yes, I did learn to drive too, but I'm now talking on a symbolic level!) Your range of options increase?where to go, what speed to travel at, and what to see along the way. Of course, there are different dangers and responsibilities when you take charge of a fast and potentially lethal vehicle. The image is an apt one, as alchemy itself is often described as the speeding up of a natural process. Alchemy accelerates the work of nature, and the traditional alchemists often put themselves at serious physical risk

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