

Salt, Sulfur and Mercury

“The Tao produced the One, the One produced the Two, the Two produced the Three. The Three produced the beings and all things. All beings and all things come out of Yin and go to Yang” -The I Ching, or Book of Changes.

When I read my initiation report again, I realize how important the reflection chamber was for me and the number of questions and observations that I made at the time lead me to think that I would have stayed there longer.

But this moment of symbolism allows me to come back to these three bowls and the materials contained in them.

In my post initiatory reflections I shared these few words with you, I quote:

I then resume my exploration of these objects and materials by trying to decode their symbolic aspect. On the right a water pitcher stored in a corner and containing a not very pleasant liquid. In front of him, symbolic materials, sulfur, salt and mercury. Alchemy is an approach that I oppose to science, it makes me think of these old superstitions out of step with our time. Would the secrets of wisdom be found in these materials? What virtues are they adorned with here?

The two questions that I was asking myself and for which I had no idea of a beginning of answer come back to me then.

If these three bowls and these three materials are represented here, their meaning remained hidden to me and I had to put myself back into the symbolic aspect of the initiation process.

I therefore began by revisiting my beliefs and convictions in relation to alchemy and of course in relation to the alchemists.

At the base of their hermetic theory, we find a great law: the Unity of Matter and the Great Work, the transmutation of metals to bring them to their perfection: gold.

Matter is one, but it can take various forms and, under these new forms, combine with itself and produce new bodies in indefinite number.

This raw material was still called seed, chaos, universal substance. Without going into further detail, Basil Valentine posits the unity of matter.

“All things come from the same seed; they were all originally born of the same mother. From unity, draw the ternary number and bring the ternary back to unity” said Paracelsus “the father of Hermetic medicine”.

This may be another key to decode the symbolism of these three materials and explain their presence in this chamber of reflection, antechamber of death. It then becomes the separation of life, the old life to which one must renounce and even die. Is not the will then the finalization of this abandonment of this symbolic death?

After having triumphed over this formidable test, the candidate for a new life will have to make the three journeys symbolizing this new path of evolution and its stages.

Salt, mercury and sulfur

Three subjects? Certainly not!

Three principles of the creation of all things... alchemy is an approach to creation, a symbolic research of mutation and evolution.

Three principles of creation, of evolution or rather of transformation as the alchemists thought.

Here we are in the Masonic symbolism and may be the reason of the presence of these three subjects in the chamber of reflection.

The student must then understand that Sulfur, Mercury and Salt are only abstractions, convenient to designate a set of properties, a symbolism to discover and to bring closer to the Masonic approach, knowing that it is not obviously, metallic Mercury, not more than sulfur vulgar, or salt kitchen, but three Principles.

The binding and balancing salt, the active principle sulfur and the reactive principle mercury.

This is the universal principle of transformation of matter, of energy.

The three cups are there to remind us of the essence of all things, of all living creations, belonging to the mineral, vegetable or animal world.

The chamber of reflection, the first test for the student. He enters there, the antechamber of his new life, and finds the symbols that are supposed to explain his path, his approach, what he will find in masonry.

Three cups to instruct the future apprentice.

Certainly, Plato had understood the importance of any tripartite edifice, when he taught in the rhyme: "But, that two terms alone form a beautiful composition, this is not possible without a third. For there must be a bond between them that brings them both together.

Isn't the transmutation of a simple metal into gold symbolic of the transformation of the profane into...? Into what, by the way?

These three cups bring me back to what I came here to find.

How can this path help me to reach this ultimate wisdom, this understanding of the world, of others and of myself?

Paracelsus, who cannot be dissociated from this symbolic reflection, advocated Spagyria as an alchemical process, which can be understood etymologically by :

spao extract and agero gather

Which, in other words, means that one must :

- extract these three substances ;
- purify them separately;
- reunite them by joining them harmoniously.

I also understand that it is useless to compare my path with that of others, the place where I am with that where my brothers are. We do not necessarily follow the same path, we are not at the same point.

I then accepted that masonry did not make anyone perfect, but allowed everyone to improve. At his own pace, at his own speed, in his own direction.

I can then make the link with these three cups.

These are our three founding principles and each of us can give a different meaning to these three principles, his and only his.

To each his strength, to each his wisdom and to each his beauty.

The ritual is then there to show us how to light each of these three little lights that make us so different and so similar at the same time.

The alchemist Bernard the Trevisan, who echoed the ancients, had some enlightening words to say about these three principles:

"Thus is Trinity in unity, and unity in Trinity, for there are body, spirit and soul. There also is Souldphre, Mercury, Salt".

Thus he highlighted the spiritual analogy between the metaphysical conception of Man: spirit, soul, body, and the three principles linked to living matter: Mercury, Sulfur, Salt.

More prosaically, what am I made of, what are the principles that make up what I am?

How to answer this question in a less esoteric or more exoteric way?

This brings me back to my own personal development journey. Applying these three principles to it gives :

An active force, that part of my personality that pushes me to act, to build and to learn. A reactive force, the one that allows me to establish relationships with others, to be compassionate and to understand in order to help.

And a neutral force, the one that allows me to step back from events, the one that makes me an impartial observer of the world and gives me a timeless vision of Life. It is also the one that allows me to relate the events of the present with my past, my future, in a temporal perspective that gives each element the place it deserves.

It remains for me to distinguish them from each other, to purify them, to perfect them in order to reassemble them later!

I like this perspective that this symbolism allows me. It is within me that I find the riches that will allow me to perfect myself, to arrive at this wisdom to which everyone aspires.

The Masonic approach provides me with the means of this evolution towards which I tend, I remain the alchemist, the creator and the only one responsible. It remains for me to make my own this biblical truth contained in the proverbs of the old testament:

- It is by Wisdom that the Eternal One founded the Earth.

- It is by Intelligence that He established the Heavens.
- By Science the abysses were opened.
- And the clouds distilled the dew.

I have Spoken, W::M::.

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