

AS ABOVE, SO BELOW

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As Above – So Below

This popular maxim is taken from 'The Emerald Tablet' one of a collection of ancient writings titled *Hermetica*. A series of essays, attributed to the penmanship of Hermes Trismegistus, a syncretic figure based on ancient Greek and Egyptian mythology. The actual identity of the author or authors are unknown but the works date after 200BC¹ and emanated from Hellenistic Alexandria.

Hermetic teachings relate to there being a cosmological correspondence between life on Earth and a yet unknown or unremembered existence in an-*other* vibrant dimension where the eternal Godhead may be seen and recognised. The prime lesson being that the most important goal in a mortal life is to achieve personal “gnosis” i.e., Knowledge of divine mysteries. “This is O Tat, the Gnosis of the Mind, Vision of things Divine, God-knowledge is-it, for the cup is God's” ².

Since time immemorial the entire gamut of the human experience became fixed upon the celestial sphere and mankind has sensed an innate omphalic attachment to the cosmos and its Creator. Through myth and metaphor supernatural forces were deemed to overlook and conspire with our mortal heroes and heroines as they played out the unceasing dramas of love, loss, sacrifice, death and redemption.

Archetypes, which the 20th Century psychologist Carl Jung supposed to constitute as being part of the collective unconscious, manifested 'above' as divine showings between the physical aspects of “the Seven Rulers who enclose the cosmos that the sense perceives” ³ i.e., the visible planets: these showings in their turn manifesting on Earth 'below'.

The observation of the expression of the macrocosm, the Universe and its corresponding experience expressed through the microcosm, that is humankind, evolved into the science and craft that is Astrology. Even today, acting as fallible intermediaries of cause and effect, astrologers attempt to interpret allegorically the planetary and stellar motions encapsulated in a person's horoscope in correlation to what is happening in the life of the individual that comes to them seeking insight and guidance.

The natural world in its entirety was also envisioned as part of the cosmic plan. “For that whereas the Godhead is Nature's ever-making-new-again the cosmic mixture, Nature herself is also co-established in that Godhead.”⁴ So into the system of astrological correspondences animals, plants, gemstones, minerals, metals, and colour were also included. All things were connected to the rulership of a particular planet and therefore to the Godhead. The seven notes of the musical scale were also assigned to the seven visible planets, and it was Pythagoras (c.570-c.495BC) who applied to these cosmic Lords his own theory of numerical harmonics namely the *Harmony of the Spheres*.⁵

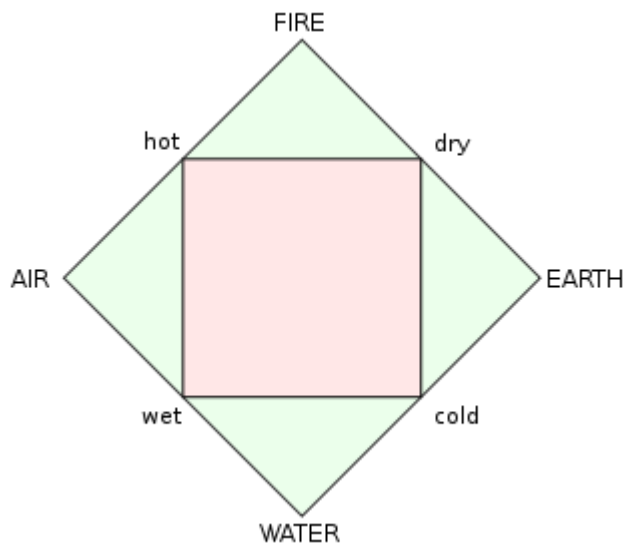
God created the cosmos as a living creature with a soul and an intelligence and Plato (c.428-c.327BC) in his efforts to comprehend such a state of existence steered his powers of reasoning towards the theory of Substantialism. Nicholas Campion in his book “The Great Year” describes this theory “...at its heart lay the doctrine that underlying all physical phenomena lies a 'deeper substance' which exerts an invisible controlling function over the visible events of human history”.⁶ Plato also mooted the idea that “the physical world bears

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the mark of Superior Forms, each thing partaking in the Forms it exemplifies.”⁷

In ancient times the four primary physical elements of Fire, Earth, Air and Water were believed to comprise the fundamental substance of all living things on Earth. The first reference made by the Greeks concerning elements is credited to the Sicilian philosopher Empedocles (c.450 BC) to which Aristotle (c.384-c.322BC) Plato's student, attributed the corresponding qualities of hot-cold, dry-wet.

By ascribing these mutable qualities to the four elements Aristotle's reasoning formed the basis of the idea of transmutation which involves the changing of one element into another. The four elements were linked by the four qualities, each element possessing two qualities, both of which linked it to another element. Thus allowing an element to transmute by way of the quality that acted as a bridge between them.⁸



(diagram: 4 Elements + qualities according to Aristotle)

In an effort to understand the human anatomy this too was endowed with astral correspondences and the transmutable qualities of the elements were reflected in the four humours and temperaments as the table below shows: -

Element	Zodiac Signs	Temperament	Physics	Psychology
Fire	AR/SG/LE	Choleric	Plasma	Intuitive
Earth	TA/VI/CP	Melancholic	Solid	Sensation
Air	GE/LI/AQ	Sanguine	Gaseous	Thinking
Water	CN/SC/PI	Phlegmatic	Liquid	Feeling

Planet	Element	Temperament	Humour	Qualities
Jupiter	Air	Sanguine	Blood	Hot and moist
Sun/Mars	Fire	Choleric	Yellow Bile	Hot and dry

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Moon/Venus	Water	Phlegmatic	Phlegm	Cold and moist
Saturn/Mercury	Earth	Melancholic	Black Bile	Cold and dry

To occultists these correspondences are as fundamentally important today as they ever were. For a 21st Century astrologer, establishing in which polarity, element, modality, and zodiac sign the planets and Angles reside in a radix is essential for understanding the natural disposition of an individual.

Another important area of esotericism that incorporates the relevance of correspondences is Alchemy. The four elements and the visible planets under the auspices of astrological knowledge, whereby the alchemist calculates the timings of his work to correspond in harmony with planetary natural rhythms and cycles, are incorporated into the alchemical processes.

Following the teachings of Hermeticism and applying the potency of the ubiquitous Philosopher's stone,⁹ a magical substance that compressed the unifying spirit of the living force of the cosmos within it, to their task, alchemists of old are remembered for their attempts to transform lead into gold. However, the fundamental and underlying purpose of alchemy today and for always has been its intention of the transformation of *any* substance into its *true potential*.

During the Renaissance the texts of the Corpus Hermeticum were acquired by the powerful and influential Italian Cosimo de Medici and at his behest they were translated into Italian by Marsilio Ficino. Ficino's translations introduced European alchemists to these Hellenistic teachings which inspired the likes of Paracelsus (c.1493 – c.1541AD). Known as the father of holistic medicine Paracelsus believed in the power of positive thinking as a curative and that in order to treat an illness one had to treat the whole person thereby applying the natural magic of the doctrine of correspondence of the macrocosm within the microcosm.¹⁰

Even in modern times alchemy observes that everything in nature and within the alchemist himself is related. Transforming his base self – the *prima materia* – through the alchemical processes of The Lesser Work - *Nigredo* (Corrupted); *Albedo* (Whitening); *Citrinitas* (Yellowing) and finally *Rubedo* (Successful transmutation) the ultimate criteria is the spiritual purification of the adept. The symbolism of these stages being -

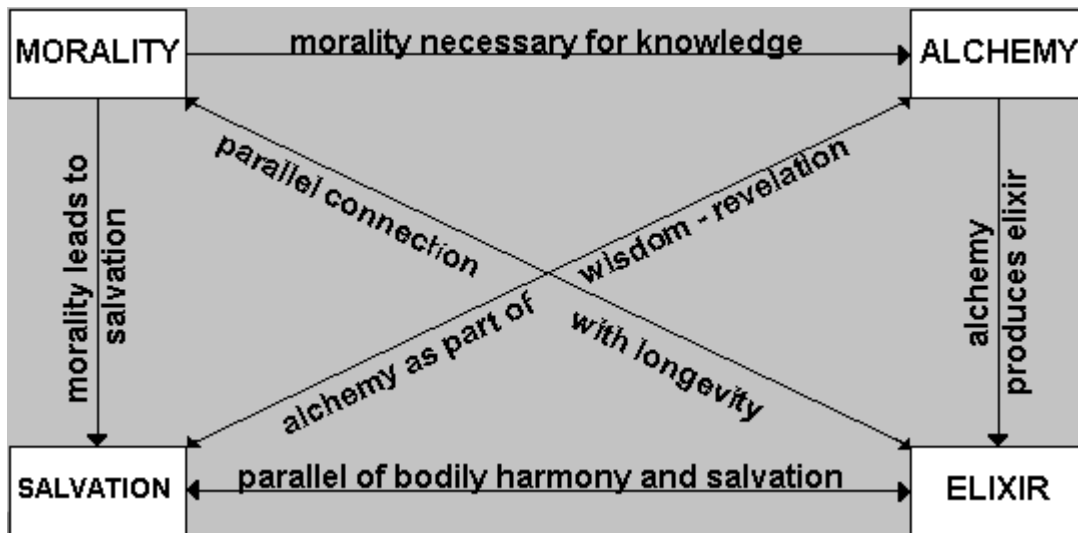
- To extract the sinful soul from the body.
- Elevate the soul so it can be inspired by Spirit.
- Reunite the soul with the body in order to be reborn.

One can draw parallels of alchemy with the philosophical schools of the Pythagorists and the Orphists, who by using their knowledge of mathematics and geometry, in an attempt to connect with the “divine source” or the “One” (God), evolved systems of metaphysics based on number. They sought to elevate the soul to a higher dimension through mathematical calculation. Postulating that God was number One and that all other numbers emanated from One.¹¹

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Orphism ¹² appreciated the concept of the duality of man's nature. Whereby man's soul is entrapped in human flesh and therefore he has to undergo purification of his corrupt nature and experience death in order to achieve purity, immortality and ultimately reunion with the divine.

Alchemists in their own way, were striving to attain the same result as the diagram below, based on the thoughts and practices of the famous alchemist Roger Bacon, shows.



(diagram: Edmund Brehm – Roger Bacon's Place in the history of Alchemy 1976)

Incorporating celestial correspondences within a religious context the Holy Bible makes claim of man being created in God's image¹³ and early Christians looked upon Jesus Christ as the Philosopher's Stone as He had the ability to resurrect others.¹⁴

“They said to him: Tell us who you are so that we may believe in you. He said to them: You scrutinize the face of heaven and earth, and him who is before you, you have not known, and you know not how to prove this revelation.” ¹⁵

In conclusion although man lives a mortal life as a sentient being once his physical body dies his soul is a continuum, deathless “for death is of destruction and nothing in the Cosmos is destroyed”.¹⁶ However, due to the Fall in the Garden of Eden,¹⁷ cleaved from the Source the sanctified pilgrimage back to the bosom of God continues to be an agonising and bloodstained chronicle of mankind's best and worst endeavours.

Ultimately despite their contextual disparities belief systems worldwide act as a cosmic bridge between the temporal and the spiritual. Through prayer, inspiration and kindly acts mortal man 'below' continues to acknowledge the eternal correspondence with the One-and-the-Only 'above' and aspires to return to Him.

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