

# ALCHEMICAL HEALING



A GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL, PHYSICAL,  
AND TRANSFORMATIONAL MEDICINE

NICKI SCULLY



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Illustrated by  
Scott Fray



Bear & Company  
Rochester, Vermont



*For my beloved husband, Mark Hallert, who shares with me a magical partnership that is forever in  
service to the healing of our blessed Mother Earth, and All Our Relations.*

---

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Into my alchemical vessel I set my intention to create this book, and the various ingredients began to reveal themselves. Many people provided contributions without which this book would never have been completed, and for which I am deeply grateful.

The special influence and knowledge of a number of teachers were initially poured into my sacred cauldron: among them were Nadia Eagles, Martin High Bear, Oh Shinnah, Bethel Phaigh, and Rollin Thunder. The *prima materia* was retrieved with the help of Brian O’Dea.

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## PRAISE FOR *ALCHEMICAL HEALING*

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“Nicky Scully presents a detailed, very useful compendium of transformational practices from the esoteric alchemical traditions. A wise and wonderful book to be savored, sure to bring great benefits to those who practice and apply these methods.”

RALPH METZNER, PH.D., PSYCHOLOGIST  
AUTHOR OF *THE UNFOLDING SELF*

“Artist, philosopher, traveler, alchemist, and healer, Nicki Scully has healed herself and brought the light of healing to everyone around her. *Alchemical Healing* is rich and whole-hearted, practical and inspiring. I could not put it down.”

ALBERTO VILLOLDO, PH.D.  
AUTHOR OF *SHAMAN, HEALER, SACERDOTE*

“A lifetime of wisdom breathes inside these pages. If you could read a book that would change and charge and heal your life, wouldn't you? Nicki Scully has the Rx. She's got the mojo. This is the book.”

NORMANDI ELLIOTT  
AUTHOR OF *AWAKENING OSIRIS*  
*THE EGYPTIAN BOOK OF THE DEAD*

“Here is a masterful work that provides clear instructions as to once and future ways of healing self, other, and planet. Here is alchemy at its best and most comprehensive. The reader is charged with delight in new possibilities growing out of ancient knowings. Scully gives us a book that is to be savored as well as used.”

JEAN HOUSTON, PH.D.  
AUTHOR OF *JUMP TIME* AND *A MYTHIC LIFE*

“Nicki Scully is one of most innovative healers on the planet. In *Alchemical Healing*, she shares what she has learned about physical and spiritual transformation and includes exercises, meditations, and visualizations that serve to put the information to immediate use.

STANLEY KRIPPNER, PH.D., CO-AUTHOR OF  
*EXTRAORDINARY DREAMS AND HOW TO USE THEM*

“*Alchemical Healing* is a living bridge to ancient wisdom, a golden gift to all who would begin the Great Work of personal and global transformation. Using the terminology and operations of alchemy Nicki Scully presents a bona fide and universal system of initiation and healing.”

DENNIS WILLIAM HAUCK, ALCHEMIST AND AUTHOR OF  
*THE EMERALD TABLE*  
*ALCHEMY FOR PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION*

“Nicki Sully's *Alchemical Healing* is a welcome addition to Chopra's *Quantum Healing* and deals specifically and forcibly with new insights based on ancient wisdom on just what you need to do to let the healing process occur.”

FRED ALAN WOLF, PH.D.  
AUTHOR OF *MATTER INTO FEELING*

“High praise for Nicki and this excellent book! Nicki, herself a healed-healer, brings to this offering her experience, wisdom, and personal passion for creatively addressing all forms of dis-ease, along with a fierce dedication to supporting others in the process of awakening and developing their healing hearts and hands. This is a powerful and timely book that supports resolution of the challenging issues of our time through our own offering of healing to All Our Relations.”

BROOKE MEDICINE EAGLE  
AUTHOR OF *BUFFALO WOMAN COMES SINGING* AND  
*THE LAST GHOST DANCE*

“Nicki Scully may well be one of the great alchemical practitioners of our time. A medical intuitive, teacher, and healer, in *Alchemical Healing* she shares her own fascinating healing journey, then in step-by-step journeys, initiations, and exercises, provides readers with the tools necessary for using this ancient system of healing. A truly remarkable book that enables the reader to not only understand but to practice alchemical healing.”

ROSEMARY GLADSTAR, HERBALIST  
AUTHOR OF *HERBAL HEALING FOR WOMAN* AND  
FOUNDER OF UNITED PLANT SAVING

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## PREFACE

# PURPOSE

**HEALING IS BY NATURE** an alchemical process. With clear intention and resolve, we can use our adverse situations to help us grow spiritually, emotionally, and even physically, which opens up a myriad of possibilities regarding how we choose to live our lives and how we relate to one another and the world.

All people have inherent healing abilities that, for the most part, are not recognized or acknowledged in our culture. Although our population has burgeoned since the industrial revolution and the advent of modern medical technology, many of the simple, effective, and free or easily affordable cures have been lost and largely forgotten. Western culture suffered a severe setback in this regard during the Inquisition, when healers were considered heretics and burned at the stake. In our rush for freedom in the New World, we assumed that the original inhabitants of this land were primitives, and in our arrogance, laid waste to thousands of years of cultural and spiritual development that had preceded us here. Regardless of our race or where we came from, most of us have been cut off from the wisdom of our ancestors for so long that we need help to remember ourselves. It is time to reclaim the power and pathways to knowledge that are buried deep within our psyches and our DNA. Within us dwell all the memories of our ancestors, and the ability to more fully comprehend new mysteries bursting forth from our unfolding universe. We are all mystics and sages waiting to remember what we've misplaced.

We are living during an unprecedented explosion of technology; now it is time to catch up with an equal explosion of spirituality. The purpose of this book is to further our awakening. In the course of remembering, we are not limited to what is in our own heads; we have access to the gestalt of the entire accumulated wisdom in the fullness of time. Part of the work of Alchemical Healing is to reawaken ourselves to these possibilities so that we may gain effective skill in healing. The other part is to actually transform ourselves to higher levels of awareness and ability so that we become fully healthy and accountable beings. Alchemical Healing is both a school of knowledge and a spiritual path to an enlightened state of presence.

It is important for readers of this book to know at the outset that this is primarily a hands-on manual that provides a series of initiatory steps toward mastering a powerful healing form. Alchemical Healing is a modern alchemical tradition based in the same eternal source of intelligence that sustained the high civilization of ancient Egypt and many of the great magical and alchemical traditions that still survive today.

The challenge I face in writing this book is to provide the basics, the palette and tools for the work without limiting the creative expression of what is more an art form than a doctrine. The power of Alchemical Healing comes from the intention of its practitioners and from their willingness to suspend any personal agenda in the healing work in order to allow something new to happen each time. It requires attention, focused concentration and presence, and expanded awareness that honors intelligence and invites inspiration and assistance from the realms of spirit. Skill can be developed

through practice, and by learning about the elements used, much as an artist learns about the properties of her chosen medium. True magic, however, cannot be contrived. It is the gift of grace and the Mystery.

It is, therefore, my intention to use these pages to convey as much as I can about the medium of Alchemical Healing. I will stress the importance of fostering confidence in your intuition, making relationships with the elements and allies that support the work, and learning to work with the tools and techniques I have found most useful. It is also my intention to honor those who have supported the growth of Alchemical Healing, the teachers who have been trained by me and who know the initiations and attunements at a deeper level than presented here. This is a primer; it is not a teacher's manual. Please do not take it upon yourself to teach this work to others without the extensive training required. Alchemical Healing teachers can assist you in reaching more refined levels of work, and can also share advanced techniques that are beyond the scope of this book. Whether you use this book alone, in a circle of friends or a study group, or have access to an authorized Alchemical Healing instructor, this handbook will provide you with a vast array of innovative tools for your medicine bag.

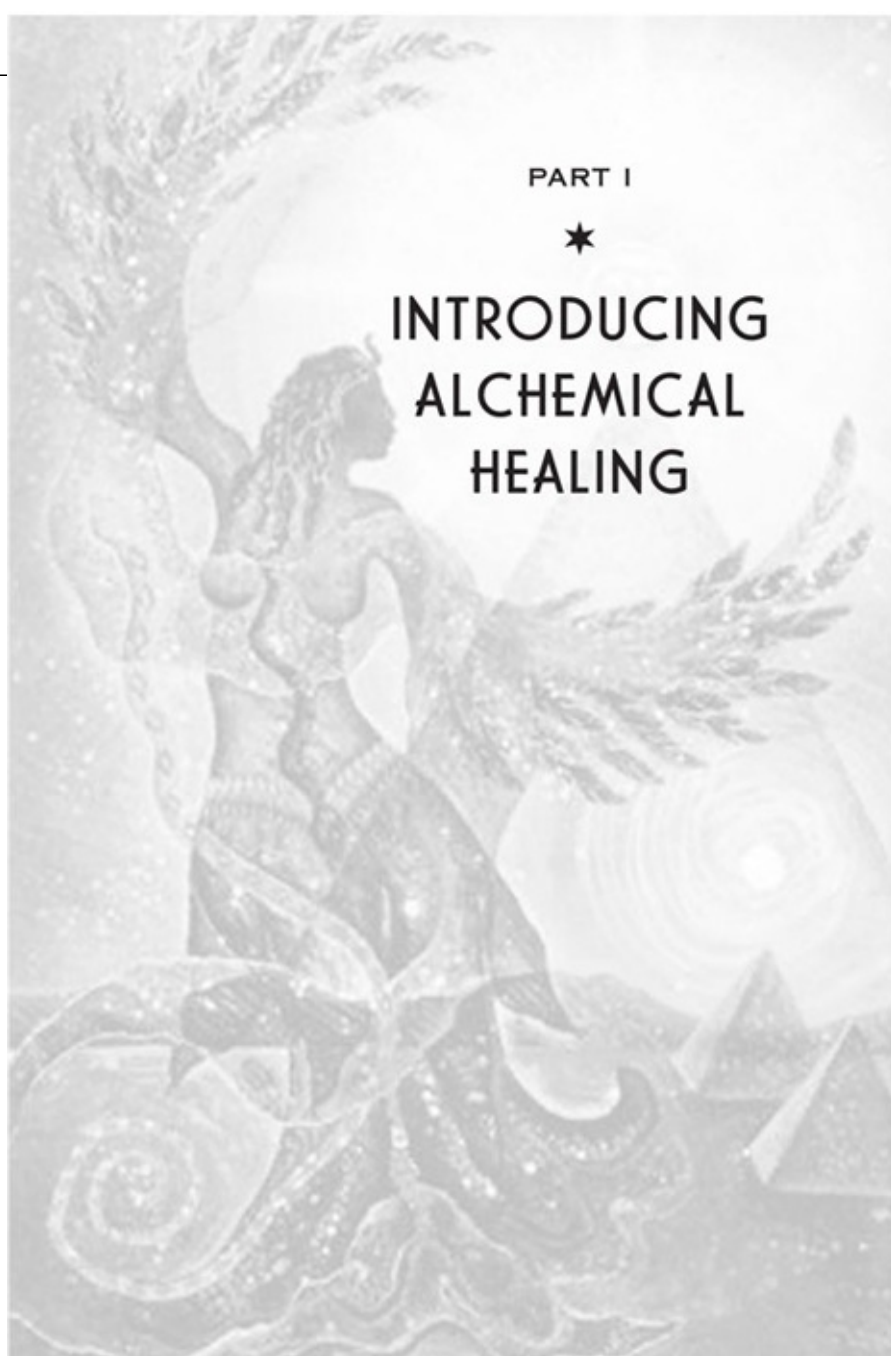
I hope you will discover that healing as an intentional activity is a natural result of expanding your consciousness to a much broader experience of reality, one that includes the regeneration of wisdom and one that ultimately leads to becoming a fully present, awake, and more enlightened human being.

The introductory remarks that follow in the first four chapters create a context within which the reader can identify the source and container for Alchemical Healing as a form. At the same time, I tell some relevant parts of my own life story and describe the path by which I came to discover the healing abilities that I believe are inherent in each of us. The actual hands-on work begins with Part I

PART I



INTRODUCING  
ALCHEMICAL  
HEALING



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# 1

## RITE OF PASSAGE

THE CROWD WAS EXCITED. I could hear the swelling sound of thousands of fans undulating through the old building into the dressing room where I was being outfitted, growing louder and louder. It was a few minutes before midnight, December 31, 1983. I looked in the mirror and adjusted the fresh wreath of bloodred roses on my head. The grotesque makeup and diapers were weird, but the rest of my costume was comfortable—black leotard and tights painted front and back with the bones of a skeleton. A white satin banner with the number 1984 was draped across my front like a Mexican bandito's bullets, or a beauty pageant queen's sash.

The Grateful Dead always rang in the New Year with great fanfare. To the audience, I, along with my ex-husband Rock, in a matching costume but with an Uncle Sam top hat, would appear as we had for the previous five years. We were symbols of the Dead, grateful to be alive, dancing.

I could feel the excitement of the crowd mounting as I went from the dressing room to the stage and listened for the count down ... four, three, two, one—then the huge roar from the audience as the first bars of the music erupted into a festive and rousing rendition of "Sugar Magnolia," and thousands of balloons dropped from the cavernous ceiling of the San Francisco Civic Auditorium. Rock and I danced in the New Year tossing roses to the crowd while the great rock and roll impresario, Bill Graham, dressed as Father Time, stood atop a huge mock-up of the Earth while it rolled from the back of the auditorium all the way down to the stage. The joyfully frenzied crowd went proverbially wild.

I was still rushing with excitement and bliss as I came off the stage when a hand grabbed my shoulder and spun me around. "Come quickly!" my friend Shane cried urgently. "My sister ..." I couldn't hear much over the music and the clamor of the crowd. He pulled me a short distance through the throng to where his sister lay, surrounded by concerned, protective people waiting for help to appear. The medics arrived at the same time as I did, and worked swiftly yet carefully to get her onto a scoop stretcher. I followed them to the place where Rock Med was set up, still not sure what had happened, and took a position at her head. I made eye contact and began pouring energy in through her crown.

The doctor was serious, all business in his demeanor, although he wore glitter on his face. He told everyone who wasn't a necessary part of his team to leave; then he looked at me and asked, "What are you doing?"

"I'm a hands-on healer," I replied. My hands were visibly vibrating as I stood there holding both hands above her without being invasive.

"Okay, stay where you are."

He then began a careful examination and quickly determined that she needed to be taken to the hospital. I learned that an overzealous fan had either jumped or fallen from the balcony and landed on Anne, then run off through the crowd. The doctor was concerned that her back might be broken. Aga-

he turned to me.

“Will you go with her in the ambulance?”

---

I experienced a flood of mixed emotions. “That’s up to her,” I said; but when I looked back down at the frightened young face I knew I would stay with her as long as I could—and I did. We locked eyes and I kept the energy running as the ambulance sped through the streets of San Francisco, sirens blaring. It was a surreal ride. No words were shared, yet there was a deep intimacy in our connection, I felt as though my eyes were the shock absorbers that carried her through each bump and jolt on the journey. Across the gulf between her pain and my presence, I made my passage from apprentice to healer. In those defining moments, I knew fully, perhaps for the first time, who I was.

Things were even stranger at San Francisco General. Apparently New Year’s Eve is a popular night at this huge hospital. There were gurneys carrying people in various levels of emergency littered all over the halls. I kept to my vigil, holding eye contact as much of the time as I could, and kept the energy flowing.

Finally it was time for Anne to enter a door through which I could not pass; yet it would be hours, even days, before her eyes did not appear in front of mine. When the door closed behind her, I turned around and started down the hall—the grim reaper in roses, barefoot, passing one gurney after another, all occupied by the victims of revelry gone awry.

Hitchhiking wasn’t as hard as I thought it would be for a chilly, barefoot skeleton. Because the hospital was overwhelmed and only admitting the most urgent of cases, in the parking lot I easily caught a ride from a van that was carrying an accident victim looking for another hospital for treatment. The driver dropped me off at the concert just at the moment when the last strains of the encore wafted out to the street, followed by the appreciative roar of the crowd.

The passage was complete. The reflection continued.



I did not have a working knowledge of alchemy at the time I had this experience. Only in retrospect am I able to view my life with recognition of the initiations, rites of passage, and stages of the alchemical process each experience represents. What made that New Year’s Eve a defining moment in my life was the realization that my commitment as a healer surpassed all other priorities. I was forty years old, and I had found myself and —with absolute certainty—my reason for being. Never again would I ask the question, What am I doing here? From this moment forward, the question would be simply, How can I do it better? How can I accomplish more?

Alchemically, I was at both the end and the beginning. I had completed a full round of the *Opus*, the alchemical process that we continuously cycle through as we move through the stages of development in our lives. My essential nature was revealed to me. Although there is no end to becoming, the propulsive energies for the next phase of my life were set into motion.<sup>1</sup>

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## 2

# ALCHEMY

ALCHEMY IS THE PROCESS by which each of us moves from our primal state of unconsciousness, through the various alchemical stages represented by our most elemental experiences, to the realization of full awakening, or enlightenment. It is the interactive dance through which we are constantly weaving spirit and matter into the multidimensional tapestry of life. Alchemy is a process that spirals from cycle to cycle, ever upward and forward, repeating itself as required to transform and change us through the experiences of our body, soul, psyche, and spirit. In alchemical terminology it is called the *Opus*, or *Great Work*. The higher state of consciousness and self-understanding that results includes recognition of our connection to the spirit world and awareness of the interconnectedness of all beings.

The goal of the Great Work is called, among other things, the philosophers' stone, the universal medicine, alchemical gold, and the elixir of life. It is the interpenetration of spirit and matter—the spiritualization of our material selves, and the materialization of our spiritual essence.

Alchemy has much in common with shamanism. A shaman is a multidimensional traveler who journeys into various realms of spirit to bring back power and healing for the benefit of his or her community. A shaman's development requires a breakdown of ego, and toward this end there are rites of passage that often lead to the edge of or beyond the physical, mental, and emotional tolerance of most people. I've never heard of a shaman who has not undergone ordeals that tested his mettle and stretched the envelope of his abilities. All shamans go through a process of decomposition and re-membering in order to find their personal power and abilities, and all have allies from the spirit world with whom they consult and often merge. These allies include plants, animals, minerals, elemental forces, and often the spirits of places. Even the realms beyond death are open to certain shamans.

As in alchemy, a shaman's body and psyche are his laboratory, and through his initiatory experiences he develops the power, the humility, and the relationships he needs to function as an intercessor for others. He is also a medicine maker, often creating his cures as a result of divine inspiration.

The roots of classical alchemy are found in the Arabic, *Al Khemit*, which translates roughly as “the black land.” *Khem* is the ancient Egyptian word for Egypt herself—the land of black, fertile silt that was left after the inundation swept through the Nile Valley each year, the place of the fecund earth which, when blessed by the regenerative forces of nature, brought forth new life that grew and nourished the people.

The word *alchemy* commonly refers to a legendary medieval art by which an adept could turn lead into gold. This is only one aspect of alchemy. Those “puffers,” so called because of their frantic use of the bellows, whose sole purpose was the generation of riches, were an embarrassment to true



alchemists, and have maligned the reputation of an art with a much more noble objective.

For those actually engaged in the Great Work, the transmutation of metals was an allegory veiling their true goal. This goal was a superior and interior achievement—the alchemical gold enlightenment—through which one transcends duality and illusion and becomes one with the fabric of creation, where creator and creation are one.

*What is the matter?* Integrated into our language is this common question, which goes for the underlying source of *that which is in need of transformation*. Some ancient texts say that the goal of the Work can only be achieved by starting with that which contains at its source some of the basic ingredient of the desired result. This ingredient is the *prima materia*, or prime matter. In Egypt, the obvious analogy was the fertile black soil itself. For the later alchemist, it is variously the base metal and/or the unconscious mind. In plant alchemy, it is the active curative essence that is rendered from the physical plant. Ultimately, alchemy is an enigma that offers seemingly paradoxical, often contradictory ground rules for a mysterious, although not insurmountable, challenge, to know ourselves fully, inside and out.

The ancient art of alchemy is easily understood by an example found in nature, the transformation that occurs over time in the creation of a diamond. The matter starts as carbon, deep within the earth. Through elemental interaction and when the appropriate amount of heat and pressure is applied and sustained, transmutation occurs—the soft black material becomes the exquisite, clear, hard, brilliant diamond.

Pressure is a fundamental part of that process, and as we explore the process of alchemy in our own lives, we discover that it is through the management of pressure that we achieve personal mastery. It is not so much about what comes to us in our life experience, but rather how we respond to it that indicates our level of mastery. Alchemically, we can see every adverse condition as a valuable part of the process, grist for the inner mill in which transmutation takes place. In healing, it is the disease that forces us to learn how to transform in order to heal.

The basic tenets of alchemy are distilled in the Emerald Tablet, one of the most quoted and studied of the guiding treatises of alchemical lore. The Emerald Tablet is attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary author of works on theosophy, magic, wisdom, and alchemy, who is associated with the Greek god Hermes, and the ancient Egyptian god of wisdom, Thoth. The Tablet suggests that “that which is above is the same as that which is below: All that exists is of One Mind, or of One Thing, and they are the same.”<sup>2</sup> It is the goal of the alchemist to bring spirit and matter into alignment and harmony. Within that relationship rests the secret of creation, and with it our ability to co-create our own reality and to heal ourselves and others.

The language used to convey ancient and medieval alchemy was purposely misleading, encoded in terms so difficult to understand that the majority of those who tried to decipher it were either lost astray or forced to give up. Medieval scholars often found it to be “gibberish,” a word they coined to refer to the work of Geber, an ancient Arabian alchemist whose writings they could not understand. The Great Work of alchemy was disguised in symbolic language that described the process of the transmutation of the black earth of potential into the alchemical gold of illumination. In other words, alchemy described the transformation of the chaos of the mind into realization of the true essence of being.

It is important to note that I developed Alchemical Healing as a form before I undertook any formal study of classical alchemy. It has been a source of tremendous validation for me to discover the depth and breadth of the parallels between Alchemical Healing and what I now know to be true and pure alchemy. Traditional alchemy can be studied superficially; however, only direct, fresh experience brings it to life. The steps required to create the resulting elixir or stone relate directly to the experiences required to achieve mastery and enlightenment. Each stage represents an archetypal

experience through which one is forced to grow in a certain way.

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## THE STAGES OF ALCHEMY

The number of operations in the alchemical process vary according to the source. Although I have seen them expressed many ways, most of the books I have consulted suggest that there are seven operations in the Great Work. These are *calcination*, *dissolution*, *separation*, *conjunctio*, *fermentation*, *distillation*, and *coagulation*. Although there is a generally regarded succession, these operations can occur simultaneously or in a different order. Like the ancient alchemical symbol of the orobouris—the snake swallowing its tail—the steps continue to repeat themselves in the infinite cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. The interpenetration of these opposites—the spiritual and the corporeal—within ourselves leads to the clarity of consciousness that results in the illumined stone. It is within the body and mind of the aspirant that these processes occur. We are the alchemical vessel within which transmutation happens.

In the first stages of the work, the corporeal elements themselves, Fire, Water, Air, and Earth, work their magic on the body and/or soul. *Calcination*, the first operation, is like the fire that burns away a substance but what remains of substance, the ash. Most of us have experienced moments when life as we know it disintegrates. The plug is pulled, and all the systems on which we would normally rely crash, leaving us desperately adrift, in search of something to cling to that is absolutely solid and true.



*Figure 2.1. The Orobouris*

*Dissolution*, the second operation, works to dissolve the more spiritual or psychic elements, or consciousness itself. *Dissolution* is the “solve” in *solve et coagula*, the melting of the ego that encourages the ultimate transmutation from ego to essence.

All of the processes of alchemy repeat themselves in the course of our lives, and the first two often happen simultaneously. As I reflect on the experiences in my own life, from the newly gained perspective of classical alchemy, one of the clearest calcination and dissolution operations started when I was diagnosed with cancer, just after my first book was published in 1991. I had just completed a full round of the Opus, and life was fuller and more exciting than ever. My world seemed in perfect order, and I was at the top of my game. In that singular moment when the words “you have cancer” were spoken, the world as I knew it crumbled around me, and I knew I was in for a very different future than the one I had planned.

The processes of calcination and dissolution continued through most of my chemotherapy treatment. While I lay steeping in the poisonous chemicals during an intensive four-month protocol,

wasn't just the cancer cells that dissolved. My entire understanding of myself, my judgments, and the habits I had developed in order to survive also dissolved. I had to die to my old self, and in doing so I discovered that much of the old artificial persona was not worth resurrecting.

During the process of *separation*, the essence begins to emerge, separated out of what remained from the first two operations. From the Emerald Tablet, "The Wind carries it in its belly." Wind, and the element Air, is associated with discrimination. That which is subtle is separated from that which is gross "gently, and with great ingenuity." We are forced to develop new ways of perceiving reality in order to function. The Sufi poet Rumi, in a translation by Coleman Barks, speaks on separation: "We know separation so well because we've tasted the union. The reed flute makes music because it has already experienced changing mud and rain and light into sugarcane. Longing becomes more poignant if in the distance you can't tell whether your friend is going away or coming back. The pushing away pulls you in."

Following the calcination and dissolution that my cancer treatment provided, I was able to consciously discriminate between what were unhealthy habit patterns from my past that had contributed to my disease, and what I knew would work better for me in the future.

The hypervigilance catalyzed by the potentially fatal experience of cancer had an unexpected and beneficial side effect: I learned that with expanded awareness one can consciously hold opposites within oneself. Such ability and the resulting space it creates are hallmarks of having reached the separation stage, and a prelude to something new occurring.

The fourth operation is the *conjunction*. This joining of opposites moves one beyond duality and into a higher state, evidenced by a new perspective. As we merge our soul and our spirit, male and female, above and below, intuition and logic within our being, we become balanced and whole. It is like having a foot in both worlds—like appreciating the passion and magic of sex while at the same time understanding its mechanics and chemistry.

There are *lesser* and *greater* conjunctions. If the first three operations are incomplete, or the result is still impure, a lesser conjunction occurs. Psychologically that happens when the ego refuses to die. The offspring of this conjunction is necessarily weak or deformed, and mortification, a form of death, follows. This sets off the putrefaction process and the naturally ensuing fermentation. The rotting and decomposition gives way to new life as the action of digestion breeds energy.

I live in Oregon, where the winters are wet and cold and where most of the garden dies off at the end of the growing season. It is during this fallow time that the hidden work happens. The worms and bacteria in the soil eat the roots and the manure that we add and bring new life and new energy to what appeared to be dead. We see that same thing in our lives in the dark and quiet times when we are gestating new ideas and incubating inspiration.

We all have experienced lesser conjunctions where the result is not immediately sustained. It is through a kind of death and renewal that we find great benefit from what initially appear to be our most challenging situations. Bad marriages can be like that, for it is often in the reflective time after the death of a relationship that new possibilities awaken.



Cancer was certainly a case in point for me—it was during the darkest, most miserable descent into my vision quest by poisoning that I experienced the following epiphany, one of several that happened during my treatment, and one that I recognize as a pivotal healing moment.

Four close friends who had studied healing with me for many years were working on me, as they did every Monday and Tuesday evening during my weekly intensive chemotherapy protocol. They practiced the healing work we had learned during the previous ten years. We played what we intuited

as appropriate music, and this evening, the music was particularly effective as a vehicle. As my friends worked the healing energies, I found myself traveling inward, deeper and deeper, until I entered a level where I recognized what felt like the patterning of genes. Several days prior, I had seen a TV show that mentioned the possibility of a damaged gene found in women with a proclivity for breast cancer. With the support of the music, the spirits, and my friends, I was able to enter deeply into my body, connect to this gene, and bring it forth, almost as though I was holding it in my hand. At that point I was left with a dilemma: I have never thought of violence as an appropriate means for making anything better. Yet here I was, my body a battlefield, armed with an arsenal of chemicals developed to deal cancer its death blows, hoping to do so without doing irrevocable damage to healthy organs and tissues. In prior sessions I'd spent a lot of time dealing with high levels of toxins and clearing them out of my systems. This time, with the magic of the moment and the intention that was being focused, I was able to direct my full attention on the gene and know it transformed and healed through love. A basic pattern in the blueprint of my being shifted from life destroying to life affirming. I felt it. I knew it.

When the music next shifted I found myself desiring to strengthen and protect my organs, particularly my heart. It was as if all of the diverse traditions of my experience blended with the eclectic qualities in the music, the hands of my friends, and all events that had contributed to the current moment—and I prayed for my heart to be opened. Layer upon layer of bright patterned veils opened to reveal yet deeper patterns until all barriers dissolved, and in that moment, the music passed through my whole unobstructed being in rushes as wind passing through a reed. I knew myself to be in total unity with all of life and all of spirit.

I felt the healing. I knew myself to be healed.

Throughout all the processes of alchemy, it is important to remember the teaching from the Emerald Tablet: “That which is Below corresponds with that which is Above, and that which is Above corresponds with that which is Below.” What happens in the spirit world is a reflection of what happens in the physical world. In healing, it is easier to make the changes in the energetic or spirit world. According to the “as above, so below” tenet, those changes are reflected back into the physical body, and healing happens according to natural law.

Although the greater conjunction leads directly to the goal of the Opus, it usually requires further purification through fermentation and distillation in order to coagulate into the “stone” and achieve complete union with the divine. The newly awakened and divinely inspired offspring is further purified through *distillation*, during which the vaporous quintessence is rendered from the new material and reintroduced as spirit in form. During this process we can observe the transmutation as it occurs, perceiving the changes with our heightened sensitivities. In distillation, we find a key mystical process by which gross elements become more rarified and closer to the divine quintessence that is the goal of alchemy. It is through an analogous process of purification that we find ourselves closer to our own divine spiritual nature.

Despite the powerful healing I had experienced, I was determined to complete my prescribed protocol. During the subsequent and final weeks of treatment, profound opportunities for magic entered and nourished my healing process. My spirit guides and allies were always with me as I continued to steep in the active processes of fermentation and distillation. Upon completion of sixteen weeks of intensive chemotherapy, with the catheter still implanted in my chest, I flew to San Barbara and went into the studio to produce one of my most powerful audiocassettes, *Awakening the Cobra*.<sup>3</sup> During the guided journey on the tape, Cobra clears the energy channels of the listener, opens and invigorates all the chakras, and awakens the kundalini energy in the body. All seven steps of alchemy are addressed within the journey of the cobra, who is now accessible as an internal ally. Perhaps this tape was the physical expression, the living symbol of the final stage, *coagulation*, in the

round of the alchemical process. The cobra had been a potent ally throughout my treatment, and I had now sufficiently comprehended her spirit so that she could extend her power through the tape and out into the world, to continue the work we had begun together.

It is in the final operation of the Great Work that the alchemist achieves his or her divine potential. Coagulation reveals pure wisdom, the incorruptible balm that heals all and transcends all aspects of the mundane world. This is the elixir of life, the philosopher's stone or universal medicine, alchemical gold.

Yet there is no end to our becoming. No sooner do we complete one round on the alchemical spiral of consciousness than we start over again. The Work is never complete. No sooner was I finished with chemotherapy and subsequent radiation treatment than I was back on the road, teaching and traveling to Egypt, and noticing how the matter had changed.



Alchemy utilizes the four gross elements—Earth, Water, Fire, and Air—as well as the quintessential Essence that is the result of the perfected mix of these elements. Alchemy in its truest sense is the mixing of elements to create transformation. Some consider it to be the precursor to modern chemistry, Jungian and transpersonal psychology, and the Western traditions of magical arts, such as Tarot and Cabala. The same could be said of all modern healing forms that bring together these same elements in a variety of ways to assist in healing.

Alchemy relies heavily on symbolism to convey meaning, and the symbols develop their own life over time. The symbols used by the ancient alchemists, accessible in the collective unconscious of their ancestors, remain imbedded still in the collective unconsciousness of their descendants. Because of consistencies in the art and metaphysical laws of the various traditions, practitioners bring the symbols to life through the practice of modern alchemy. I have tried to clearly explain most of the symbolic language when it appears throughout this book, and you will recognize many of the symbols as integral parts of the visualizations we will use to guide us through the journey into mastery of Alchemical Healing.

As we have seen in the seven stages of alchemy, the infusion of spirit is key to the transmutational process in the more advanced operations of the Work. Spiritual inspiration is half of the equation; without it, the possibilities for genuine healing are greatly reduced. It is the co-creative nature of the relationship between ourselves and spirit that is the foundation of this path. Relationships with spirit guides provide a vital link between the spirit world and this material plane. It is similar to weaving: the weft is spirit and the warp is matter, then where they intersect, new patterns are established. When you bring the separate elements of color, texture, line, form, skill, and intelligence together to create a preconceived design, the result of the weaving is transformation. Alchemical Healing is a practical process joining that which is above (weft) with that which is below (warp), simultaneously strengthening and healing while aligning the inner and outer realities of all that are involved.



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# 3

## THE TREASURE HUNT

THERE IS A SMALL LIVING TRADITION in Tibet known as the Terma tradition, whose purpose is to find and translate hidden treasures left by the ancient sage Padmasambava. Known as the father of Tibetan Buddhism, Padmasambava brought the Buddhist teachings from India to Tibet around fourteen hundred years ago. He was a man of great power and magic. Before he left the earth plane, he hid these treasures so that they would be found at certain times and in certain places, and by quite specific people. It is the purpose of the tertons, the adherents of this tradition, to find these terma treasures, then translate them and bring the knowledge that they hold out into the world.

The treasures usually come in two forms: earth termas and mind termas. An earth terma is a physical manifestation such as a scroll or written teaching, or a statue, implement, or stone, that is revealed, often at great peril for the terton, whose life might depend upon being in exactly the right place at the right time. A mind terma is a complex, sophisticated thought form that coalesces in the consciousness of the terton when all preparations have been properly made and guidance is followed. Some tertons are said to return lifetime after lifetime to search out these jewels of wisdom, the tiny capsules of Padmasambava.<sup>4</sup>

### FINDING THE PATH

My own life has been a magnificent treasure hunt, a sacred journey of Alchemical Healing, although I wasn't aware of its greater purpose during the earlier stages of the trip. I've moved from clue to clue, searching my experience for glints of brilliance, tinges of magic, the wonders of impossibility. Each clue has been a treasure in its own rite, with special intrinsic value, and each has helped me to establish my direction.

I had no concept of spirituality while growing up. Consequently, I did not always have conscious spiritual relationships. I've often wondered if there is any precedence in my family heritage for who I am and what I have become. I came from an ordinary family, or so it seemed to me. No stories of life in the "old country" have survived. My grandparents on both sides escaped the anti-Semitic pogroms in Russia and Lithuania near the turn of the century, and by the time I was born in New York, my parents had done their best to assimilate into mainstream American culture. When I was three, we moved west by train to a stucco and stone house in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood of Los Angeles, just off Fairfax Avenue. When I was eight we moved to Beverly Hills, where I was raised cloistered in the illusion of my parents' social status and monetary security, both of which collapsed just before my senior year in high school when my gambler father lost his entire fortune. Reviewing that time in my life from an alchemical perspective, I can see why alchemy is considered risky business. My father never recovered from this calcination, the most humbling experience of his life. Yet many of my enduring values were rendered from that dark time when everything that was not genuine simply

vanished.

Still, there were no indications that I would follow a healing path and become a spiritual teacher. I experienced no precognition, no strange déjà vu, no psychic phenomena. Nor did I show any special gifts or talent for healing, although as a child I loved to play doctor and brought home every broken winged bird and malnourished stray cat I encountered.

As a matter of fact, when it comes to healing, I don't think I have any inherent gifts or am any different than anyone else. And although I always fancied myself a seeker, I was pushing forty by the time I had an inkling of my purpose in life. Only now, looking back, can I see that all relationships and events large and small conspired to lead me to the path of service to which my life is now consciously dedicated.

The shamanic path often includes the use of sacraments. When I was first introduced to LSD I did not recognize it as a sacrament, nor did I see it as a step on a shamanic path. I had dutifully followed the course my parents had charted for me, but it simply wasn't working. By my junior year at university, I had lost interest in academics and was ready to make it or break it in a world that was actually quite friendly compared to today's standards. New York held allure, so there I went, seeking to find a man to fulfill the only ambition I knew of: that of finding a husband who would support me and a social scene in which I could become my mother. Although I found a job with great potential, I was still struggling with the values of my upbringing, and I quickly grew bored. Depth and the profundity of life's adventures had not yet been made known to me.

A cousin visiting from Miami introduced me to a "longhair" who extolled the virtues of LSD. Fascinated, but skeptical, I read everything that I could find on the subject at the time. More investigations gave me the reassurance that widespread research into psychedelics had been undertaken on college campuses and in legitimate research centers. LSD was still legal, and it appeared to be much more interesting than my mundane job. I felt different from my friends and coworkers, and that sense of incongruity made me ripe for the new "hippie" movement that was still in its infancy. I returned to Los Angeles, enrolled for a short time in art school, and actively sought to transform my world according to my limited research into consciousness and psychedelics.

Thus I naively stumbled into the most pivotal moment in my life, which also was the entrance into the first serious round of the alchemical process. After opening the "doors of perception" my life changed radically. I immersed myself in the experience, if not the culture, of LSD. My day job at the time was as secretary to the comptroller of Four Star Television. At night I observed the goings on of the hippies on Sunset Boulevard from a safe distance, and on weekends I explored my expanding consciousness with LSD. Because there were no laws against psychedelics at that time, I had no fear of reprisals. In my innocence I reveled in a remarkable, storybook experience of color and insight, vision and joy. I dove into my psyche and my sexuality, released from the confines of my upbringing. Although I thoroughly enjoyed being a kid with the run of the candy store, awareness of the spiritual magic didn't come until much later, perhaps partially because of my secular background, but also because I had no spiritual elders or role models. Even so, my direction was changing, and as I embraced the internal fires of calcination and the simultaneous dissolution of the only road map I had, the doors of my old life closed one by one and I was forced to move to the next level of the unknown.

At the end of 1966 I quit my job and moved from Los Angeles to San Francisco. My conviction that I could remain unchanged by the hippie movement evaporated the moment I moved into the red, yellow, and blue Victorian time warp of a house on the corner of Sutter and Lyon streets. There I discovered the world of psychedelic community, drug dealing, and rock-and-roll. My experience, however, was not all happiness and bliss. While the flower children were dancing in the streets of San Francisco, I was again experiencing several operations in my personal alchemical process—calcination, dissolution, separation, and most certainly, the mortification aspect of fermentation.

became embroiled in a terrifying marriage that, in retrospect, I see as the tempering of the steel of my being.

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My first husband was a notorious drug smuggler whose main talent was to invoke fear—in friends and enemies alike. I first allowed him to become my lover during a vulnerable, high-dose psychedelic moment. I had not yet learned the humility and respect required of psychedelic research; I was ill prepared mentally and emotionally for such explorations, and the results were catastrophic.

Goldfinger, as he was infamously known in the Haight-Ashbury district, was born Ken Connell—a fiery red-haired wild man, mostly of Irish descent. Sharp-minded and ruthless, he sheltered a tender soul within the huge barrier he had built to separate himself from his military parents, who were for some time alcoholics who blamed him for the death of his older brother during a childhood accident.

While I was completely open and vulnerable, he gladly accepted credit for the magical experience I was having, and I was willing to give it to him. My attempts to sustain the levels of love encountered in the altered space of our primary conjunction proved impossible. The resulting schism in my psyche grew during the early months of our relationship, until my mind, weakened from the combination of drug abuse, chemicals, and living a lie, could no longer take the dichotomy and I lost all perspective. During a particularly potent mescaline and LSD trip I followed a storm tunnel in my mind and ended up frozen with terror, in a semicatatonic state. I could not speak and experienced extreme paranoia during which I believed the TV and radio were talking to me. I lost more than my ego that day and the weeks that followed. Unable to deal with my interpretations of the haranguing voices, I attempted suicide three times, finally waking up from a two-and-a-half-day coma in the hospital. Caught climbing out the window, I was strapped down on a gurney and taken to a mental hospital. When I was released some weeks later, Ken convinced me that I could not survive without his help, and that I needed marital control to make sure nothing bad happened to me.

Our wedding was held at the Straight Theater in Haight-Ashbury late that summer. It was a classic hippie wedding. I wore a 1930s satin wedding gown; most of the guests were in costume. Janice Joplin sang, and her band, Big Brother and the Holding Company, made the music.

In that marriage, I was cloistered from both the conventional world and the evolving consciousness of the hippies. But in the Woodstock summer of 1969, I finally emerged, pregnant with my first daughter, Spirit Acacia. Concern for the welfare of my coming child had given me the strength to make and sustain a complete break with her father.

I was six weeks pregnant when I fell in love with Rock Scully. He was a manager of the psychedelic rock band, the Grateful Dead, for the first twenty years of their stellar career. I told him I was pregnant. “You will be so beautiful,” he replied, totally sincere. I was smitten.

I followed the band to the famous festival at Woodstock where Rock and I frolicked in the rain, swam in the lake, and fell more deeply in love. Over the next few years, he not only gave me a sanctuary, but also provided me with the opportunity to heal myself and become part of the leading edge of a musical/spiritual lifestyle that shaped my character and paved the way for me to become a healer.

I was determined to be the best mother I could be; but my lifestyle was unstable. Spirit was barely three months old when we lost our home to fire. This new round of calcination once again stripped me of all outward semblance of a foundation and forced me to find strength and consistency within. Our family of three lived as gypsies in a pick-up truck camper shell hung with velvet tapestries for the next year or so, parking at various friends’ homes, enjoying a wonderful sense of freedom. When I was pregnant again with my second daughter, Sage, we found a great place in Mill Valley. Having two children and a home to sustain became my full-time occupation, although as I gradually returned to mental strength and competence, I was able to expand my interests and my participation in our large extended family.



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