Lecture 14 Secunda - basic theory of alchemy

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At this point it is necessary to provide a bit of theory about mineral alchemy, specifically mineral or metallic oils ... as we start to venture away from the strictly herbal (or animal) work into the realm of the mineral kingdom proper.

As with the herbal kingdom and the animal kingdom the first two things of concern when starting to learn the disciplines of mineral alchemy are to discover the method of reducing the crude matter (the mineral as it comes from the mine) into its chaos. This is the mineral putrefaction that facilitates the separation of the mineral principals. The first principal that must be dealt with (or the first in line for consideration) is the oil ... in this case we are talking about mineral sulphur.

I have already shown you how to obtain the sulphur from salt of tartar. That process though is not 'typical' of metallic/mineral oil extraction, although it does demonstrate an important angle on the deeper understanding of how spagyrics works, along natural paths, in the mineral kingdom.

To carry out these early experiments a student will require a distillation train (the same as is used with herbal work). Three solvents can be used, two of which at present have preference 'vinegar' (diluted acetic acid) and 'caustic soda' (sodium hydroxide).

Normal white vinegar that is brought at the supermarket is acceptible and caustic soda can also be brought at most supermarkets. If you are keen and want a better result from the acetic solvent you would be better off to source an acetic concentrate or to buy glacial acetic acid. Concentrates of acetic acid, in food grade, can be brought from food and beverage wholesalers often (food grade acetic or food grade vinegar for preserving.)

Acetic acid is the acid that is in common vinegar. In synthetic vinegars industrial food grade acetic acid (synthesized from acetylene) is simply added to water. For dark vinegar it has colouring added. Natural

vinegar is simply red wine that has been attacked by acetobacter (a bacteria.) Acetobacter converts the alcohol in the wine into acetic acid, in this way wine becomes vinegar.

Unfortunately the acetic acid in vinegar cannot easily be concentrated by distillation in the same way that alcohol can. This is because acetic acid and water have boiling points which are very close together. The ancient method of concentrating this acid was to freeze the vinegar. The water would form ice crystals and get stick in the bottle and the concentateed acetic acid would be decanted (poured off.)

But it is extremely difficult to get more than 50% water/acetic concentration by freezing. The only way we can easily obtain highly concentrated acetic acid today (99%) is to buy 'glacial acetic' acid. It is called glacial because it freezes into what looks like a block of ice at relatively high temperatures. Glacial acetic, though, is synthetic acetic, largely produced from acetylene.

Caustic soda (sodium hydroxide) is an alkali (base) and is what is known as a strong base. In other words you have to be careful with it because it is highly corrosive. In fact both concentrated acetic and this caustic soda need to be treated with respect.

Once you have a distillation train, your caustic soda and vinegar (or concentrated acetic acid) you will need 12 glass jars with sealable lids (plastic or glass, not metal) and a sample of five of the seven basic (alchemic) metals ...

Copper, iron, tin, lead, and silver.

Pure samples are the best. So copper electrical wire or copper pipe is good. Iron from old sources of iron are best. Things like very old nails or old iron chains, pipes or iron bars. Tin can be got from tin cans. Lead can be got from lead fishing sinkers (although you need to be sure they are actually lead and not some other metal.) I used silver from an old silver teaspoon.

The amount you require is roughly a volume equal to 1 cubic centimetre. Or, say, about the size of a half dollar. The metal needs to be cut into very thin strips or preferably made into filings.

In order to begin the first main experiment with metallic/mineral alchemy these are the primary requisites.

The first concept to learn is how the metallic chaos is generated. This is a situation similar to the

herbal chaos where the plant is fermentated (by the natural-long path) or macerated (by the shorter path that art provides.)

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