

element thirteen: SYMBOLIZING

PRACTICING THE 13 ELEMENTS OF ALCHEMY




1 CREATE ENABLING STORIES. Meaning is not in events. An event can be interpreted in many ways—as a catastrophe or opportunity, random occurrence or causal result, limitation or hidden gift. The story we construe determines our response. Some stories put us in the center of action, open possibility, and enable movement. Others make us passive, bitter, or blind. And may keep us locked in place. We often concern ourselves far too much with facts and far too little with underlying narratives.

2 LOOK BEYOND THE LITERAL. Often we look only at the most reduced interpretations. We explain disease in terms of cells, economic downturn in terms of financial decisions. But these and other things are also symbolic—metaphors and analogs of greater truths. *If we stop at the most superficial interpretation, we miss the largest significance.* And we may fail to understand the point of leverage far away from where something manifests. Real solutions require us to look further into what is really going on.

3 PAY ATTENTION TO RECURRING DREAMS AND SYMBOLS. That which is important presents itself over and over. It may show up as a recurring dream. Or it may take the form of a repeating life circumstance. Often each iteration becomes more dramatic. That's because the point is our learning, and *life will not let us go.* It insists we get it—easily if possible, painfully if necessary. Look deeply at anything that recurs and assume a stance of inquiry rather than defense.

4 NOTICE OMENS. An omen is a way of experiencing a little bit of something that is beginning to form. Like the sun coming up in the morning, we see the first rays before we see the sun itself. All significant events have forewarnings. By reading these symbols, we can act early, much as animals move out of the path of a tsunami.

A person stands in a vast, green field under a clear blue sky. A large flock of white birds is flying in a circular pattern in the upper part of the sky. The scene is bright and open, suggesting a sense of freedom and connection with nature.

5 PRACTICE WITH SMALL MEANINGS. Ask symbolic questions about ordinary things. Why is this uniform white? What does the shape and placement of the nurses' station convey? What might I infer from the way this person walks, leans forward, or holds their arms? What additional meaning is contained in the name, timing, or presentation of this situation? Everything from clothing to cars carries symbolic meaning. This symbolic value may outweigh the actual value.

6 DESIGN SYMBOLIC FORMS TO INITIATE MATERIAL FORMS. Reality is reflective. What we do in the third dimension mirrors into subtle causal dimensions and vice versa. Symbolic forms such as artistic representations of our vision, ceremonies, and rituals are physical analogs of what we want to create. And they concentrate emotion and intent. Groups who share intent induce a powerful response at the highest levels of reality. Symbolic actions remind us we are creators of our story and enable us to come together and author the next chapter.

7 DEVELOP A PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY. When we see ourselves as embodiments of great archetypal energies, we become more like them. Identification with a particular hero, heroine, saint, sage, warrior, knight, or luminary amplifies their qualities in us. Even animals may remind us of some aspect of ourselves. Mythic identifications give us meaning. And they allow the collective energy built around this character or symbol to flow through us.

8 BUILD SYMBOLIC LITERACY. The universe speaks in symbols. If you understand symbolic meaning, you can read life. It's much the same as the way letters and language enable us to read books. Some symbols are nearly universal. They appear throughout the world and mean essentially the same thing across cultures. Other symbols are highly personal. They mean something to you alone because of your life story. As an alchemist, you want to understand as many symbols as possible. The broader your range, the greater your ability to receive and recognize.