



# *element nine:* PUTRIFYING

## PRACTICING THE 13 ELEMENTS OF ALCHEMY

**1 THE GREAT RETURN.** Putrification is the total breakdown that creates the space and fundamental ingredients for something new. Ideally, we are as intentional about how things *end* as how things *begin*. But often we are more comfortable with the idea of beginnings than endings, and we cling to relationships, projects, and jobs for much too long instead of co-creating the space for their most graceful and natural transition. And we experience an abrupt and painful fracturing from the very thing we are afraid of letting go.

**2 STEPPING IN.** Some things, if left to decline, will lead to non-ideal or even catastrophic outcomes. This is because their natural course is disputed by dissonance, lack of support, or even vested interest. The present context no longer supports their becoming. And unless we intervene quickly and distinctly, what *could happen* never will.

**3 STEPPING BACK.** In their infancy, some bad situations are simply unresolvable—there hasn't been enough time for necessary conversations, adequate discovery of evidence, and development of general awareness. In these situations anything you do *too soon* won't work. But if you wait awhile, the situation will resolve itself because of the insight and efforts of everyone involved.

**4 THE FIXERS.** Sometimes bad situations only get *worse* when we try to fix them. Because we are emphasizing and adding energy to something that is going to decline one way or the other—and we are well past the point where a smooth and graceful transition is possible. Often we experience our inability to save somebody from a difficult circumstance as the inability to *save ourselves*. So we do whatever it takes to rescue what's ultimately not possible to preserve.



**5 PRESERVATION INSTINCT.** Our base instinct is to preserve things at their peak. But just when some things are most successful, they are also most ready to transform into something else. The success of the current chapter has made the way for an entirely new and expected new chapter. Which will only happen if we can let go of what's working well to make possible what will shortly become unimaginably better. It's important that the best things in our lives don't end up holding us hostage.

**6 PRECIPITATING CRISIS.** Some situations won't get a lot better without first getting a little bit worse. So the alchemist may precipitate a crisis in order to get things *unstuck*—breaking the ties that bind. A precipitated crisis may also wake people up, exert pressure on the status quo, or illuminate vulnerabilities presently out of sight.

**7 CHAOS & CREATION.** Chaos permits the ultimate expression of creativity. When things are falling apart, energy is released, resources are freed, and old bonds are broken. But often, our need to be in control causes us to unnecessarily associate chaos with risk. Alchemical managers welcome breakdown because it creates the ideal conditions for change and new growth—it enriches the mix.

**8 ACCEPT, FORGIVE, LET IT GO.** Then do it again. And again. What we have not forgiven holds a piece of us in bondage. We are not only stuck in our history, but what is not forgiven siphons resources from the present and exhausts them in our past. If remembering an event still produces a negative emotional response, we are still held hostage. Radical forgiveness is one of the most powerful acts of putrification.

**9 DESIGNING GOOD ENDINGS.** How we end relationships is as important as how we begin them—they deserve a good birth and a good death. Often we let relationships atrophy until they become so toxic they painfully fracture. And we carry the qualities of the failed relationship into our current and future relationships. A good ending fully accepts the other person, appreciates them for who they are, and recognizes that it's time for each party to move on and newly create with others.