

Is Craniosacral Therapy Alchemical? Wisdom in Egyptian Alchemy and the Body



Incubation scene; votive relief, Athens, Archaeological Museum of Piraeus

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

Is there a wisdom in the body? This might seem like a strange question. We are used to viewing the body in purely mechanical terms - for example the heart as a pump¹ - but to see it as merely a machine because this is the most convenient metaphor is to miss something very important. Nearly all of us are familiar with the body's propensity to heal itself given the right conditions, for example in minor cuts or following surgery. Yet there are other healing processes going on in the body all the time of which we are only dimly aware, if at all. Only a very subtle approach, a listening in with a quiet receptive awareness will reveal this. Spending time with the body, not in a spirit of mastery but one of friendship and cooperation is well worth while and can reveal some hidden, almost magical properties and propensities which will be the subject of this essay.

In 1995 I became involved with craniosacral therapy, a holistic body treatment. Ever since I have been fascinated by its healing philosophy and its implications for how we live. It has occurred to me for some time that cranial work has many resonances with alchemy, the ancient and esoteric practice of turning metals into gold, and that what practitioners are doing is a form of alchemy.² A few writers on craniosacral practice have described it as such³ but not really elaborated on why they do so.

Does my intuition and their ascription have any substance, or is it just a nice tag? This essay seeks to explore that question in some depth, namely: whether the processes and changes that take place in the body and mind during sessions of biodynamic craniosacral therapy can justifiably be characterized as alchemical.

I begin Part 1 by relating the story of my introduction to craniosacral therapy, which was also the beginning of a transformational journey. Then follows a brief account of the myth of Osiris, the Egyptian deity who underwent death, dismemberment and subsequent resurrection. Osiris seems to me the original 'sick king' in need of healing, and whose land would thereby be restored to fertility. Throughout the rest of the essay Osiris will stand in for me as the subject of the healing processes concerned, which can therefore be taken as applying to my own healing journey.

Following that is an introduction to craniosacral therapy and a brief account of the history and main principles of alchemy. Part 2, the main part of the essay will take us through the alchemical stages of transformation using the alchemical colours, accompanied by an elaboration on the healing practice of biodynamic

¹ Craig Holdrege points out the potential limitations of the mechanical view in *The Dynamic Heart and Circulation* (Holdrege, 2002, p.6)

² Albeit through working with the human body rather than metals.

³ For example, Charles Ridley (Ridley, 2006, 43%) and Kalinowska and Hatton (2016, p.20).

craniosacral therapy. As a primary conceptual model of alchemical transformation, I stay mainly with the ancient roots of alchemy in Egypt with the Egyptian scholar Alison Roberts as my guide. As we move through the alchemical stages, we also move through the four traditional elements of earth, water, air and fire, a series of tidal enfoldments central to craniosacral thinking, and a series of dreams. These dreams are ones I had alongside receiving craniosacral treatments both as a client and then as I underwent training, which itself involves receiving lots of treatment. They involve some striking alchemical imagery. In *Psychology and Alchemy* Jung presents a series of dreams (in a more plentiful and systematic fashion) to illustrate the subject's individuation process i.e. the path towards psychic wholeness (Jung CW 12), and he comments that alchemical imagery is frequent in dreams (Jung CW 12:32). In light of this I'm presenting my dreams along with an alchemical interpretation to show changes that appeared to be taking place in me during this period. These will be presented in italics with the date following.

Part 3 looks at some of the implications of the preceding exploration and discussion. In advance of this I'd like to highlight a few of the themes that will be important throughout. Transformation in both the case of Osiris and craniosacral therapy involves a change from a state of inertia and fragmentation to one of movement and vitality. Yet the end point of the alchemical process can seem rather static e.g. a stone, gold, the standing hermaphrodite. It would be wonderful for me if a discussion of craniosacral therapy was able to bring together both the ancient wisdom of alchemy with modern understandings of biochemistry and biophysics to form a more modern conception of the stone.

Secondly and as just mentioned, the stone or lapis, was often pictured as a hermaphrodite, signifying that a large part of the alchemical opus involved the coming together and fusion of male and female, often imaged as a king and queen, or Sol and Luna (sun and moon). This befits an enterprise whose presiding figure and guide was Mercurius, usually distinguished by his Caduceus, a staff entwined with two snakes, signifying the union of opposites. The archetypal psychologist Carl Jung says that 'Mercurius stands at the beginning and end of the work' (Jung, CW 12:404) that is, the *arcane substance* that contains the opposites and paradoxically transforms and is transformed, is base and precious at the same time (Jung, CW 14:42).

Mercurius looks back to Hermes Trismegistus, the traditional founder of alchemy, and perhaps also the Egyptian deity Thoth (Roob, 2019, p.8), whom the Greeks identified as Hermes. Focussing on these ostensibly male figures however, it is easy to forget the other half of the hermaphrodite, Aphrodite, the goddess of love. In her two books *Hathor's Alchemy* (2019) and *My Mother My Heart* (2000), Alison Roberts shows what an important part the Egyptian female deity, especially Hathor, played in the restoration of Osiris and the cosmic order. Part of my

purpose in this bringing together of craniosacral therapy and alchemy is to accentuate and honour the female dimension of the work within both. I aim to establish the incubation, gestation, and regeneration of Osiris in his mother's womb as the central healing paradigm for craniosacral therapy.

At the same time, I aim to call into question the usual male-active, female-passive dichotomy, a theme which appeared still in full cultural force as I was growing up, and exercised me greatly at the time. Although attitudes and practices have dramatically changed, at least in the Western world, I have remained deeply curious about its roots, logic and accompanying value judgments of active equals strong, dominant and desirable; passive equals weak, inferior/subservient and undesirable (Brooten, 1996), p.125, p.141, p.279, p.301, & p.324). In her fascinating examination of Greco-Roman attitudes towards gender underpinning early Christian attitudes towards female homoeroticism (1996), Bernadette Brooten convincingly demonstrates⁴ that these ideas have ancient roots and were absorbed by highly influential early Christian thinkers such as St Paul (ibid., chaps. 8-10). From there they have continued to inform our thinking and morality on account of the subsequent impact of Christianity on Western culture (ibid., p.302).

My Experience with Craniosacral Therapy

During my mid-twenties I found myself in the grip of a severe emotional crisis. Deeply unhappy and at a complete loss as to what to do about it I felt headed for a breakdown. My body manifested an overwhelming desire to simply lie down and stay there, until either I died, or something changed. My emotions started leaking out in a noticeable way, with the result that I ended up in a six-month relationship that very quickly turned sour; there was now a whole new set of emotional anguish to deal with. Completely out of my depth, my body and mind were overwhelmed, and I struggled to deal with the psycho-mental fallout. Still in this darkened state I took a job working with physically and mentally disabled adults. To my surprise (my initial enthusiasm for this job was nil - I hardly felt in a fit state to be doing any job) it turned out that this place, with its staff, residents and unusual activities provided just what I needed.

I had been drawn to the job because the institution had advertised itself as favouring 'a holistic approach.' This meant in practice that residents' individual emotional and psychological needs were attended to as well as their physical ones. Amongst the things on offer was something very intriguing called craniosacral therapy. This involved lying horizontally on a treatment couch with the

⁴ Brooten is very imaginative in her research which includes astrological texts by Claudius Ptolemy (Brooten, 1996, p.128); medical writers such as Soranus of Ephesus, (ibid., chap.5); the dream classification system of Artemidoros (ibid., chap. 6); the early church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and St John Chrysostom (ibid., chap.11) and Greek Egyptian love spells (ibid., chap. 3). Her conclusion is that the active-passive distinction was considered more primary than that of gender and determined what was considered natural and socially appropriate behaviour in men and women (ibid., pp.1-2).

practitioner performing what looked like a ‘laying on of hands.’ I had never heard of it before, but especially at that moment in my life it sounded deeply appealing, so I volunteered myself to be treated by a colleague in training. This turned out to be the most profound experience of my life and began a journey with craniosacral therapy (and my body) that has continued to bear fruit well into the present.

What was the nature of this ‘profound experience’ and why did it affect me so much? During the treatment itself I was not aware of much going on apart from a sense of relaxation descending on me (even before it began) and my therapist’s hands placed on different parts of my body. This was quite pleasant, but I wasn’t conscious of it working on me particularly. As I sat up at the end however I sensed that a deep change had come over me which is hard to describe. It was as if I was connected to the deeper part of my being which up until then had been denied true expression. As the next couple of days unfolded, I noticed further changes. For the first time in my life I experienced a strong sense of connection to everyone and everything else. It was as if a new faculty of perception had opened up whereby I was sensitized to the ‘energy’ of the environment.

As I continued to receive treatment other beneficial changes occurred. Prior to my treatment I would say I did not have a good relationship with my body or emotions. I was probably one of those who ‘had never really paid any attention to what my body was actually feeling unless it was in pain or discomfort’ (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.31). Craniosacral therapy for me was about bringing me into my body, from which I would say I was partially dissociated. The ‘listening touch’ of this subtle therapy ‘awakens a self-listening and healing in the client’ (ibid., p.14). As we were ‘re-introduced,’ my body went from being a source of pain, fear, and panic even, to something I could trust, a resource and somewhere I could feel at home. Eventually I came to trust the felt messages of my body as much if not more than my rational thinking as a guide to action. This seemed to be reflected in my journal and dreams of the time, along with an improvement in my life where I seemed to find more of a place in the world, for example meeting and befriending people who shared and further stimulated my values, outlook and interests. Inspired and intrigued by this strange, rather magical healing procedure I trained as a craniosacral therapist and this allowed me to be further ‘initiated’ into the mysteries of the body, and its extraordinary healing potential.

The Myth of Osiris

The transformational journey can be characterized in many ways, but I’m taking the myth of Osiris as my paradigm. The themes of inertia, dismemberment and loss of heart followed by re-integration fit well with both my personal journey and my vision of craniosacral therapy. Below is a very brief account of the myth of Osiris which is intended to provide an orientation point. In Part 2, I elaborate on Osiris’ healing and resurrection process in more detail so only touch on that here. According to Jan Assmann the Egyptians never state the myth of Osiris in a clear

narrative form (Assmann, 2005, p.23), or explicitly mention his death (Pinch, 2002, p.78), but 'speak... rather of the actions aimed at remedying it' (Assmann, 2005., p.25). They prefer to present this as a series of scenes leaving his death implicit.

The story emerging from these scenes is broadly as follows: Osiris, the ruling king of Egypt is slain and dismembered by his brother and rival for the throne, Seth. His limbs are thrown into the Nile and distributed throughout the land (ibid., p.24). He is mourned by his wife and sister the goddess Isis, who, along with her sister Nephthys goes in search of all the pieces and collects them with the intention of putting Osiris back together (ibid., pp.24-25). Whilst Osiris is still in a state of inertia, Isis yet manages to conceive on him a son Horus (Pinch, 2002, p.23), who battles Seth, eventually defeats him and takes his place on the throne of Egypt. Osiris is resurrected with the assistance of various deities who nourish him and restore his heart and vitality. He assumes his role as ruler in the netherworld (underworld), serving as a paradigm both for death and resurrection, (Pinch, 2002, p.78) and the seasonal vegetational cycle (ibid. p.79).

Craniosacral Therapy: A Brief Account of its Origins and Founding Principles

Craniosacral therapy as we know it⁵ originated with Dr William Garner Sutherland D.O., an osteopath born in 1873, and working in the United States mainly during the first half of the 20th century until his death in 1954 (Sutherland, 2010, p.xxiii). He graduated in osteopathy in 1900 under its founder, Andrew Taylor Still (and thus craniosacral therapy is known in some circles as cranial osteopathy. Whilst still a student, contemplating the sutures⁶ between two of the cranial bones, Sutherland had 'a guiding thought:

It was while viewing the intricate bevel-articular surfaces of the greater wings of The sphenoid and the squamous portions of the temporal bones. The thought was as follows: Bevelled, like the gills of a fish, and indicating an articular mobile mechanism for respiration (Sutherland, 2010, p.214).

Sutherland had realised that the bones of the head are designed to move,⁷ albeit in very subtle fashion (ibid., p.69). From this observation he went on to develop the 'cranial concept' (ibid. p.214), which is that along with ordinary respiration or breathing, there is a more subtle and profound respiration that occurs within the body, which he called 'Primary Respiration' (ibid., p.214). Further clinical experience led him to believe that this Primary Respiration was driven by an organizing principle he termed 'the Breath of Life', a 'spark of ignition' we 'cannot see' (ibid., p.147)(Sills, 2001, p.12). He evolved a therapeutic approach to the body using a gentle touch of the hands (Sutherland, 2010, p.1), to perceive, or 'tune in' as it's called to this very subtle form of respiration and work with it to

⁵ As craniosacral therapy involves no modern technology it is possible it was practiced by ancient peoples.

⁶ Joins where the edges of the bones of the head knit together.

⁷ Part of the reason we find movement hard to imagine is that we are only used to seeing bones when they are dead.

resolve patterns of tension, restriction, and trauma in the body (ibid., pp. 106-108).⁸

Sutherland's early work focussed on establishing the characteristic motion patterns of each bone and each phase of the 'primary respiratory mechanism' (PRM) i.e. what happened during each of the inhalation and exhalation phases (ibid., chap.28). The structural core of the body and craniosacral system was emphasized, which comprised the brain and central nervous system (CNS), the membranes and bones enclosing and protecting them, and the cerebrospinal fluid⁹ bathing and nourishing the CNS (Sutherland, 2010, p.147)(Upledger, 1998, p.5). Sutherland identified various natural fulcra¹⁰ in the body, for example the spine as a midline, the spheno-basilar junction, and the membranous junction point of the straight sinus in the brain, known as 'Sutherland's Fulcrum' (Sutherland, 2010, p.305). Disease occurred when unresolved trauma to the body resulted in compressed bones, tissues and structures, compromising the primary respiratory mechanism and the organization of the body around the natural fulcra, a process I expand upon later (Sills, 2001, chap.13). Treatment involved the practitioner sensing patterns of compression or inertia and restoring appropriate motion, one bone or tissue pattern at a time (Ridley, 2006, 22%). This process freed up the body to express Primary Respiration in all its fullness; health would naturally follow.

Towards the end of his life Sutherland alluded to more holistic elements of the PRM and subtle forces coming into play during treatment (Sutherland, 2010, pp.292-293). This grew out of his concept and experience of 'tides' within the body. It seemed that the subtle breathing that occurred could take place on at least three levels. There was a relatively fast breathing rate or tide known as the cranial rhythmic impulse (CRI), a medium rate tide which emerged when you tuned into the body as a whole (mid-tide), and a very slow, deep tide which sometimes emerged in states of great stillness (long tide)(Sills, 2001, pp.108-109). Sutherland was struck by a hidden intelligence at work in the body (Sutherland, 2010, p.204), and that a particularly fruitful way of working involved surrendering to this 'wisdom in the body.' Correspondingly, the practitioner's role became one of following and supporting the unfolding process in a deeply receptive attitude, letting the body itself do the leading (Becker, 2001, p.250). This approach became known as biodynamic craniosacral therapy and was promoted by Sutherland's student Rollin Becker among others. As this later version is what I mainly practice,

⁸ Also, the mind or psyche, see page 11.

⁹ Cerebrospinal fluid is a thin, colourless fluid generated by and filling the ventricles (spaces) of the brain and bathing the entire CNS. The free flow of this fluid which is full of nutrients was felt to be critically important (Sills, 2001, p.214)

¹⁰ A fulcrum is a point or place around which something moves, orientates, or organizes itself, in this case the tissues and fluids of the body.

I draw from Becker's work and that of Franklyn Sills and Charles Ridley, two present day biodynamic practitioners.

In this very brief introduction to cranial work it remains for me to say a little about the mind body relation. Craniosacral therapy is a body-centred therapy but involves using one's mind in the form of maintaining and directing one's awareness and attention. My experience of craniosacral therapy is that working on the body in this way also involves also working on the mind and emotions; affecting the body seems to affect these other areas of the person as well, in ways we do not fully understand. I, like many of my fellow therapists therefore, tend to view and talk of the body, mind and emotions as one living system, even though more generally the connection between psyche and soma 'is still so often unrecognised' (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.56).¹¹ However, at least since Descartes, we have tended to regard the body and mind as separate systems, with a consequent difficulty comprehending how they can come together or affect one another. Part of my purpose will be to reveal that the body, which we normally regard as a purely material (physico-biological) structure seems to unexpectedly reveal aspects of mind, not perhaps in the sense of showing ratiocination, but rather a kind of understanding or wisdom. Throughout the rest of the discussion I will refer to the human system as 'body' because I want to emphasize the body's incredible nature; I imply the other concepts of mind, soul-emotions and even spirit within that term, whilst recognizing that this is not a shared assumption or understanding within the broader community.

History and Principles of Alchemy

Western Alchemy¹² has a long and complex history which I here attempt to summarize, along with an introduction to its basic principles.

The scholarly consensus¹³ has been that alchemy arose out of a confluence of Egyptian, Greek and Gnostic ideas and practice. Egypt was thought to contribute the technical and craft side of alchemy, through its traditions of 'embalming, dyeing of cloth, jewellery, and cosmetics' (Hillman, 2015, 21%), and Greece the philosophical side, infused with Judaic and Gnostic ideas (Roberts, 2000, p.218). Alchemy's 'spirit...lies within the natural philosophy of ancient Greece' (Roob, 2019). However, Alison Roberts has convincingly argued that 'alchemy arose within ancient Egyptian religion' (Roberts, 2000, p.224).¹⁴ However this may be, alchemy appeared to pass from Egypt to the Arabs (Kingsley, 1995). They contributed significantly by developing '[alchemy's] corpus, its great wealth of

¹¹ See also Kalinowska and Hatton (2016, p.13)

¹² Alchemy also arose in China and India (Eliade, 1978, chaps.11-12), but I am concentrating on European Greco-Egyptian alchemy.

¹³ Established by the 19th century French scientist and statesman Marcellin Berthelot (Roberts, 2000, p.218).

¹⁴ Roberts presents her arguments for this in her two books *Hathor's Alchemy* (2019) and *My Heart My Mother* (2000) where she takes the reader through the iconography of many of the Egyptian temples, highlighting conceptions that seem to express alchemical thinking and possibly practice.

practical experiences, of technical knowledge, code names, maxims and allegorical images' (Roob, 2019, p.23).

The learning eventually passed on to Medieval Europe in the 12th century via Spain (ibid., p.23).¹⁵ The schoolmen took up the texts and one well known alchemical treatise, the *Aurora Consurgens* may even have originally been written by the famous 13th century theologian, Thomas Aquinas. This might seem strange until we note with Jung that 'quite early on' alchemy was 'broadened by the assimilation of ideas taken over from Christian dogma' (Jung, *CW* 12:403). In these texts the alchemical gold equated to salvation and the *lapis* to Christ, and successfully attaining it promised the redemption of both the individual soul and matter itself (Jung, *CW* 12:26).

Alchemy was given added impetus in the Renaissance with the translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* by Marsilio Ficino (Roob, 2019, p.22). The *Hermeticum* was thought to have been written by Hermes Trismegistus, a theologian of great antiquity (ibid., p.8), and was considered to be the fountain source of Western wisdom pre-dating both Christ and Plato.¹⁶ The *Hermeticum* and *Emerald Tablet*, also attributing itself to Hermes 'Trismegistus'¹⁷ enshrined many principles dear to the hearts of alchemists, one of the most important being the maxim: 'as above, so below.' This succinctly expressed the doctrine of correspondences, the idea that metals, planets, plants, minerals etc were linked in a great chain of being stretching from earth to heaven. (Yates, 1991, p.45). Working with one thing e.g. metal involved working with all the other links in the chain. Hermetic ideas spread rapidly through the intellectual circles and culture of Renaissance courts and alchemy enjoyed patronage by, for example the powerful Hapsburg Emperor Rudolf II.

Alchemy's decline began during the latter part of the 17th century in the wake of the Scientific Revolution. Aristotle, the greatest scientific authority 'for two millennia' was overthrown (Tarnas, 1991, p.291) as modern science developed a 'critical evaluation of the ancient mind' (ibid., p.294) and dismissed classical 'cosmology, epistemology, and metaphysics' as 'naïve and scientifically erroneous' (ibid., p.294). Science and religion gradually parted company (ibid., p.302), with chemistry - the ostensible successor to alchemy - becoming a purely practical discipline with no relationship to mind or the divine.¹⁸ Natural philosophy came to involve no more 'above', just a 'below'. Alchemy's decline advanced in the Enlightenment of the 18th century (Jung, *CW* 12:509) and seemed to have become

¹⁵ A wonderful book relating many stories showing texts and learning passing from Islamic Baghdad to Andalusia and from there up into France is *Ornament of the World* (2003).

¹⁶ It was eventually shown by Isaac Casaubon that the *Hermetica* was written in 'post-Christian times' (Yates, 1991, p.398) although it may be that the spirit of them is still Egyptian (Voss, 2000, p.34). See Frances Yates (1991) for the story relating to the fortunes of the *Hermeticum*.

¹⁷ It seems there 'is no agreement amongst scholars about the origins of the text', but it is 'known from both early Arabic and Latin alchemical treatises' (Roberts, 2000, p.219).

³⁰ Eliade comments that 'chemistry came into its own when substances had shed their sacred attributes' i.e. (Eliade, 1978, p.9)

relegated to the rubbish heap of history¹⁹ (*ibid.*, p.294), along with astrology with which it was closely entwined.²⁰

The 20th century saw certain scholars taking another look at alchemy, most notably the Swiss Psychologist Carl Jung. Jung (*CW* 12:342) saw alchemy as involving a projection by the alchemist onto the metals, operations, and changes in state of his own psychic processes.²¹ More latterly the archetypal psychologist James Hillman sees the alchemist as in a state of participation rather than projection. It does seem as if the alchemists were often working on more than one level, a practical one and a more personal one. They would often tell us: 'the gold he is seeking is not - as the stupid suppose - the ordinary gold' (Jung *CW* 12: p.243). I like this quote from Michael Maier in his 'Symbola aureae mensae, as it seems to envisage improvement on a reasonably human level:

There is in our chemistry a certain noble substance, in the beginning whereof is wretchedness with vinegar, but in its ending joy with gladness. Therefore, I have supposed that the same will happen to me, namely that I shall suffer difficulty, grief and weariness at first, but in the end shall come to glimpse pleasanter and easier things (Jung, *CW* 12:387).

In this essay I acknowledge that although some alchemists were concerned only with the practical matter of producing gold there was often a psychic component to alchemy and draw from both Hillman and Jung for their many fascinating insights into the various alchemical stages.

Jung and Hillman aside, how did the alchemist him or herself understand what they were doing? The alchemists saw themselves as embarked upon a great opus, or work requiring huge commitment, patience, humility, study, and concentration (Jung *CW* 12:386). The ostensible purpose of the opus was to transform base and corrupted metals into gold, the perfect metal. This was done by placing the metals in a sealed vessel and subjecting them to heat via direct flame or a heated water bath (Mclean, 1991, p.104); water and fire were both considered crucial to the alchemical process. In this initial 'nigredo' phase metals would be broken down from their original substance (*prima materia*) into their constituent parts, achieving a kind of death, a 'mortification' of the metals concerned. With further and repeating operations and processes the metals would be restored to life in the albedo phase, and from there come to perfection in a final phase known as the rubedo whence they were transformed into gold, or something called the Philosopher's Stone (Eliade, 1978, p.78). This final substance was credited with

¹⁹ It did continue to inspire many writers and artists of the 19th century (Roob, 2019, p.11)

²⁰ Alchemy was known as the 'lower astronomy' (Roob, 2019, p.76).

²¹ Jung writes: 'it should now be sufficiently clear that from its earliest days alchemy had a double face: on the one hand the practical chemical work in the laboratory, on the other a psychological process, in part consciously psychic, in part unconsciously projected and seen in the various transformations of matter' (Jung, *CW* 12:380).

miraculous properties of renewal,²² power - for instance the ability to turn other metals into gold - or healing, which is what largely concerns us here. The essence of alchemy was thus a transformation process involving a descent into 'death' and a rebirth into incorruptible radiance.

Colours as Stages of the Alchemical Process

When writing of the alchemical method, Jung says he believes it 'quite hopeless to establish any kind of order in the infinite chaos of substances and procedures' (Jung, CW 12:401). Key concepts, such as the prima materia and the Philosopher's Stone 'defy precise identification' (Eliade, 1978, p.161) and the alchemists writes 'obscurely', admitting that 'he veils his meaning on purpose' (Jung, CW 12, p.402).

None of this is terribly encouraging, but fortunately, we do have a guiding thread that has frequently been used to break down the alchemical transformational process into reasonably reliable and comprehensible stages. This, perhaps unexpectedly, is colour. 'From its earliest beginnings, alchemy has had a language of colour weaving through it...which has been retained by Greek, Jewish, Islamic and European alchemists alike' (Roberts, 2019, p.187). We are used to thinking of colours as merely secondary characteristics, as having little or no bearing on what a material object really is. The alchemists thought differently: 'the alchemical mind perceived changes in colour in the material at hand to be changes of essential nature' (Hillman, 2015, 58%).²³ So, for the alchemists, colours were perfectly suited to symbolizing the stages a living substance passed through as it transformed.

The alchemical opus comprised four stages (Jung, CW 12:333; McLean, 1991, p.118).

The first four colour terms - black, white, red, and yellow - are also the primary colour terms embracing the entire alchemical opus: *nigredo*, *albedo*, *xanthosis* or *citrinitas*, and *iosis* or *rubedo* (Hillman, 2015, 22%).

In this schema 'black', as the foundation of the work, symbolizes the initial dark phase, or turbulent 'death'...when a 'body' returns to its primal state' (Roberts, 2019, p.187-188). The second 'white' stage is a dawn, a lunar phase when life and hope begin to return. Yellow the third stage transitions into red in the final stage during the 'consummation of the alchemical operation' (Eliade, 1978, p.162). In Part 2 I use the alchemical colours to structure my account of my own transformational journey, and to explore the craniosacral treatment process. This will be my way of judging how much or little this journey and treatment process could fairly be described as alchemical.

²² The culminating substance was sometimes envisaged as an 'elixir of life,' conferring youth and/or Immortality (Eliade, 1978, pp112-113).

²³ See also Roberts (2019, p.187)

PART 2: THE ALCHEMICAL OPUS

Chapter 1: The Blackening: Nigredo

The scene cuts to a dungeon where a skeleton king is chained, disappearing/ dying through the bars of a grate in the floor with/after his wife. Feeling of very deep, inexpressible sorrow that might relate to an inability to reach/remain with the queen who disappears down the other side. Sense of incredible quietness, in respect of the event. Then the word 'The End' comes on to the screen but this is replaced by another scene as if that was a prelude.

Two huge iron doors open revealing a young prince played by Leonardo di Caprio but who looks like Johnny Depp with a white toga and longish hair. Looks noble. In the background there is a voice saying that this - the skull king was his troubled background/inheritance/father. (Beg 1999).

[As a colour] black plays an especially important role as the base of the work... and the art of alchemy was called a "black art or science" (Hillman, 2015, 21%).

The dream above begins with a grim scene in which the main character is shown languishing in a prison, constrained by a chain, in a sorrowful, critical state with a prognosis of death. Although there is a transition to a lighter, more positive scene, the initial image is without any expectation of this, quite without hope in fact. This sense of entombment, constraint, inertia, sorrow, hopelessness and ultimately, death, is characteristic of the alchemical nigredo phase, or 'blackening'. The dream seems highly nigredo-like, as it features a skeleton - typical of nigredo iconography, loss of relationship - as if one's soul has left, and shows the further descent and slipping away of figures already in a subterranean chamber i.e. dungeon. This seems to express perfectly the alchemical maxim 'black blacker than black' (Jung, CW 12: 433) when referring to the desired nigredo state, and the descent into the 'deeper and invisible realm of shades' i.e. the underworld (Hillman, 2015, 22%):

The nigredo is equated with darkness, the descent into the underworld, death (mortificatio), decay (putrefactio), entombment (coagulatio), and the corresponding psychological state of depression and disillusionment (Greene, 2006, p.139).

As Greene points out, the nigredo state often occurs following a failed or soured relationship, or a confrontation with one's inadequacies (Greene, 2006, p.139). In terms of our approach to life we 'come to an impasse' where we find that all our 'old ways of being in the world no longer seem to be working' (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.40). Psychologically it is very tough, because it 'dissolves whatever we rely upon as real and dear', and meaningful, leaving us 'without hope' (Hillman, 2015, 22%; Greene, 2006, p.139).

Yet despite all this Hillman reminds us that the nigredo is actually 'an achievement,' a 'condition of something having been worked upon' (Hillman,

2015, 22%). The thing worked upon is the prima materia, that is, us, with all our 'stuff' both good and bad, healthy and dis-eased, bodily and psychic. What is it that the nigredo is achieving? The breakdown of the old forms which are no longer working for us, the 'contracted and rigid patterns' symbolized usually by the 'old King' (McLean, 1991, p.101). The breakdown of form is the prerequisite to change, and along with the emergence of new and more healthy forms, is the essence of transformation. The nigredo then, through processes of 'mortification' (death) and 'putrefaction' (decay) serves the purpose of breaking down, disintegrating or dissolving the old patterns so that new life has a chance of arising (Hillman, 2015, 22%; Greene, 2006, p.139; Mclean, 1991, p.106).

In the myth of Osiris, the nigredo, or black stage corresponds to his death and dismemberment. We saw that Osiris is slain and cut up by Seth into separate body parts which are then strewn across the two lands of Upper and Lower Egypt. He is also left separated or dissociated from his heart. All this leaves him prone and inert, unable to move, and lacking in life-force; this is expressed in the epithet 'weary of heart' (Assmann, 2005, p.28). His body is more like a tomb than a vehicle he is able to command. In the nigredo-like body we meet the first of the four elements,²⁴ that of earth. Earth appears here as a totally passive substance, the one that has to be worked on by the other three. They are seen as closer to heaven and 'life' (Roberts, 2019, p.239.²⁵It is part of my aim to challenge this view, but for now I go along with this reading.

For Osiris to heal he must be returned to wholeness. A 'building' work has to be undertaken in which paradoxically Osiris himself is 'both the 'builder' and the one who is 'rebuilt', both the reigning Horus son and the wounded father god' (Roberts, 2019, p.105). This is fully in the nature and tradition of the alchemical 'arcane substance', that which undergoes, transforms, and completes the work.

The Body as a Coherent Whole: Life in Motion

I'd like to look at how a nigredo state of loss of heart, dismemberment and inertia might come to be held in the bodily system, but first I'd like to emphasize just how interconnected the body - as a living, breathing, working organism - actually is, whatever tension and disturbance it may be holding. One of these ways is through the fascia, 'connective tissue that encloses and supports every single structure of the body, from muscles and organs right down to the outside and inside of each individual cell' (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.75). The connective tissue in fact, interconnects 'all the cells of the body' (Ho, 2003, p.185). In addition, the tissues of the body 'function as a unified tensile field'²⁶, and express 'reciprocal tension motion' (Sills, 2001, p.184). What this means in

²⁴ The doctrine of the four elements originated with Empedocles and was developed further by Aristotle. It exercised a pervasive influence on all subsequent alchemical thinking (Roob, 2019, pp.28-29).

²⁵ See Roberts description of earthly foetal life being sustained by 'water, air and fire' (Roberts, 2019, chap.22).

²⁶ A tensile field is a 'field of action that always holds a natural tension' (Sills, 2001, p.183).

practice is that all parts of the body are sensitive to every other part of the system, and that, anything affecting one area of the body, in turn affects everything else. This tensile field is what allows the craniosacral practitioner to tune into the head for example, yet sense what is happening in the rest of the bodily system at the same time.

Our bodies are not only connected in space, but, in a certain sense time as well, through tissue memory. They ‘register everything they have ever experienced and store our memories and emotions along with our physical shapes’ (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.40). In fact:

Our bodies are a map of our histories, the narrative of our lives; they record the ways in which we were brought up, they chronicle our accidents and illnesses, our emotional experiences and our beliefs (ibid., p.13)

Yet biodynamic theorists feel that our bodies seem to hold not only the past but the future as well, in the form of an evolutionary treatment plan. Connecting with this plan is part of the treatment process.²⁷

A strong sense of connectivity in the body is often expressed and felt as healthy motion. It is motion that is the signal for life; dead things don’t move or respond. Motion in itself is not quite enough though; there needs to be a sense that movements are coordinated with the rest of the body, that they participate in a unified whole i.e. they are coherent (Ho, 2001, p.211). Healthy coherent motion is experienced in craniosacral therapy as a sense of easy and flexible response within the body, the sense of a call and an answer, a dance between the parts. This goes on all the time, but we are not usually aware of it.

Disconnection: Inertial Fulcra

So, given all this interconnectedness, how is it that we can feel incredibly disconnected? What follows is how biodynamic craniosacral theory understands the internalization of stress and disturbance within the body, and the potential negative effects of this. As we move through our lives we are exposed to various invasive forces and stresses which Rollin Becker termed biokinetic forces (Sills, 2001, p.209). These might include such things as environmental stress, pathogens, genetics, physical injury, traumatic accidents, and birth trauma (ibid., p.208). According to biodynamic theory, when the body experiences such an invasive force which it is unable to resolve, it responds in a particular way. The forces in the body responsible for maintaining health and balance - the potency of the Breath of Life - work to ‘contain and center’ any disturbance entering the system. They do this by ‘coiling inward’ the biokinetic forces in an ‘inwardly spiralling’ or centripetal motion (ibid., p.215). This has the effect of protecting the integrity of

²⁷ See discussion on the long tide beginning page 24.

the system as a whole, but naturally ‘contraction and compression’ will also result (ibid., pp.214-215).

Both biokinetic and biodynamic forces are now coiled and locked together in a pattern of condensation and contraction known as an ‘inertial fulcrum.’ Inertia means that something that would normally express motion ‘has become still’ (ibid., p.207). Like any other fulcrum inertial fulcra ‘become still places that organize the structure and function of the body’ and its ‘motility and motion’ (ibid., p.212), but this means it is much harder now, for the body to keep orientated toward its natural fulcra. We can think of the opposing forces of the natural and inertial fulcra as the battle between Horus and Seth - remembering that Horus is also Osiris himself.²⁸ Horus fought to restore balance and order established by the goddess Maat, while Seth represented the forces of chaos, constantly threatening to pull things off center. Tension, loss of energy, and loss of motion are the result.

These states can be felt in the body. It is often the case that when people come in for treatment, they are already in a nigredo-like state. When tuning in to the body, the craniosacral practitioner may sense a rock-like hardness or density in some of the joints or tissues, contraction and compression, heaviness and congestion, tightness and rigidity, and/or a sense of the system being locked up or shut down. There may simply be a general feeling of inertia with no immediate, obvious cause. The state of ‘tiredness of heart’ will be felt as a sense of exhaustion or lack of resources. It is as if the body is not able to do what it needs or wants to do. Occasionally I have felt as if the body is emitting a slightly ominous, single and unremitting low tone, or a dissonant chord; something within the body may feel trapped and isolated, with no sense of a way out, like my skull king.

Sometimes one feels a sense of dissociation in the body, another form of dismemberment and most likely the result of trauma. Trauma is any ‘incident that overwhelms us and leaves us unable to process the event and let it go’ (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.97). Dissociation, a splitting of awareness is another way in which one’s wholeness and coherence can be compromised, sometimes severely. This can be felt as a sense that the person is not really present in their body, as if ‘nobody is at home.’ In this case they appear to be floating somewhere above it (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.37). It is very common for the body to feel fragmented and disconnected, as if the different areas are not communicating with each other. For many people this is a more or less permanent state. One craniosacral practitioner comments: ‘Over the years I have noticed that many of us don’t actually live in our bodies’ (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.67). Trauma

²⁸ See page 13.

and dissociation lead to a difficulty in mobilizing ourselves for action or responding appropriately to situations; like Osiris we cannot 'command our limbs.'

A build-up of inertial fulcra either through the cumulative effects of physical and emotional stress or trauma has serious repercussions within the system.

As potency becomes more and more bound up in inertia, reduced vitality will be experienced. Tissue and fluid changes will occur, classical osteopathic lesions will be generated, reduced functioning will result, metabolic fields will become inertial, and pathological processes will have the opportunity to gain a foothold (Sills, 2001, p.212).

In other words, the body's own health and healing potential is compromised, and disease can set in. According to Becker: 'Disease states... always involve inertia' (Becker, 2001, p.247).

In this section I have focussed on the nigredo as a death-like state of inertia, fragmentation, and dissociation. In the next section I focus on the more positive breaking down process that can lead to the albedo, the white dawn.

Chapter 2: The Whitening: The Albedo

Liz is standing in front of the treatment table with her hands by her sides. Her hands are a gleaming silver, the silver feeling potent and slightly numinous in quality (Date unknown but shortly after my training when I was still having treatment).

The above dream features my craniosacral therapist just after my training. I am fond of it as it seems to express the nature of craniosacral therapy and how it works. Silver is the metal of the moon, and both silver and the moon - often called luna in alchemical writings - are associated with the albedo (Jung CW 14: 130). "Luna...is the mother of this art" (ibid., 219). This is the alchemical stage when miraculously, life begins to stir again following the death-like nigredo. Other associations with both luna and albedo are the mother, the womb, and the element of water. In this section I explain as well as I can how craniosacral therapy works, not that easy, as 'even experienced practitioners find it hard to say exactly why or how it works' (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.14). One writer whom I have found helpful is Charles Ridley, and I draw from him extensively here. I continue to use Osiris as my model for alchemical healing paradigms in the ancient world.

Lunar Receptivity: Listening with Hands and Heart

Sills sums up the essence of the craniosacral approach: 'Essentially, work within the cranial field is the art of intelligent and intuitive listening' (Sills, 2001, p.9). A session of craniosacral therapy begins with the practitioner 'tuning in' to the client's body, remembering that the body includes the whole person. Immediately

this sounds both vague and hard to imagine; for a start, is the body not solid? There is some evidence to suggest that the bodies of living organisms may be liquid crystalline in structure (Ho, 2001, p.180), which is a state in between a solid and a liquid (ibid., pp.172-3). This would mean that they are both 'flexible, malleable and responsive' and 'sensitive to electric or magnetic fields.' In short liquid crystals are 'tunable responsive systems' which renders them 'ideal for making organisms' and tuning into (ibid., p.173).

In craniosacral therapy this tuning in is achieved by placing the hands very lightly on the body and letting them relax, soften, and melt into the tissues. They will then 'subtly modulate themselves to match the resonance in your client's tissues through passively entraining to the motion in his body' (Ridley, 2006, 59%). These 'entrained' or 'silver' hands thus 'listen in' to the motion of the tissues beneath them, which might feel hard, smooth, jelly-like, vaporous, sluggish, volatile, fulsome, or ragged. Just like the alchemist, the craniosacral practitioner pays close attention to the quality of what he or she is sensing.

As well as listening in with the hands the therapist also uses their whole body and particularly their heart as a perceptive organ. For Ridley, the heart is the primary fulcrum of the whole body, the one in which the therapist should be 'resting' throughout treatment (Ridley, 2006, 40%). From there, the therapist simply waits patiently letting perceptions and sensations come to him or her, not actively looking for things or anticipating where they are going.²⁹ This is the 'open and receptive awareness' that is essential to the work (ibid., 60%). 'Waiting, in an embodied-feeling-witness presence, is your primary activity' (ibid., p.40%).

As well as attending to the client's body, it is also important to give attention to one's own. 'I try to maintain a double consciousness of what is going on in my body at the same time as being aware of what is going on in my client's' (ibid., 36%; Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.177). I have often found that when the treatment process seems to be stalling somehow, it helps to shift attention back to my own body where I usually find a tension. Simply noticing this is often sufficient for this to release and the process to resume. This happens because in tuning in and entraining oneself with the client the two systems have in effect become one. The unfolding process affects both people's systems, and it is common following a session to feel energized oneself. Ho goes so far as to suggest that the best way to communicate with and thus investigate living organisms is 'to be one with the system' (Ho, 2003, p.230).³⁰ This seems very lunar indeed, where the boundaries between client and therapist are blurred and their bodies become somewhat blended.

²⁹ 'You must simply sense what is, with no desire for resolution of any kind' (Ridley, 2006, 40%).

³⁰ See chapter 14 for her discussion of the benefits of non-invasively observing living organisms.

After the therapist is tuned in and has established a good resonance with the system it is good to move into the mid-tide, or fluid tide. The whole concept of ‘tides’ is again a very lunar one.³¹ The mid-tide tends to arise as attention is shifted from the part of the body the hands are touching, to the body as a whole. As you do this the body seems to become ‘one seamless texture that you perceive as a rhythmic and graceful fluid matrix’ (ibid., 39%). The first time I experienced the fluid tide was a great sensation and afterwards I never really wanted to work on the body in a piecemeal fashion again.³² In mid-tide the solid-liquid nature of the body is readily apparent, and you may ‘heed primary respiration as whole body excursions that ebb and flow from the client’s mid-line’³³ (ibid., 39%). One may also feel the fluid drive, ‘a subtle potency in fluid tide... “a fluid within a fluid”...[which] concentrates and moves like a river in a lake’ (ibid., 39%). This fluid drive will shift from place to place, resolving inertial fulcra as the system enters states of balance and stillness.³⁴This is the ‘inherent treatment plan’ in action, the seeming ability of the body to know what it needs to do.³⁵

Healing of Osiris: Enter the Goddess

We last met Osiris in a death-like state of inertia, dismemberment, and heart weariness. Incapacitated and therefore passive, he is unable to help himself and must rely on others to turn the situation around. His sister Isis is the ‘first to take action.’ Together with their sister Nephthys, she gathers his parts back together and mourns for him (Assmann, 2005, p.24). It might seem that their grief is a purely private matter, but it is clear that the Egyptians saw mourning as a healing activity (ibid., p.115). With the tears of Isis, goddess of the moon we have the second element and the first of the three essential to healing: water. This water was often equated with the inundation waters of the Nile, returning to render the land suitable for growing, the land being the earthly expression of Osiris (Pinch, 2002, p.79). Just as the body’s liquid crystalline solid-liquid matrix is experienced in mid-tide, the black earth³⁶ of Egypt is infused with the Nile waters, restoring the land to fertility though nothing is yet visible.

What is healing about tears and mourning? It seems that the specifically female grief of Isis has the power to reach the ‘dead’ through its life-giving connective power (Assmann, 2005, pp.115-116). Connectivity was a critical matter for the Egyptians as it was indelibly entwined with life (ibid., p.27).

it is clear that for the Egyptians, this principle of “connectivity,” the attachment of an individual to a whole, was what characterized life in general. Life was connection, death was disintegration and isolation (Assmann, 2005, p.21)³⁷

³¹ The moon being responsible for the tides of the sea.

³² I.e. treating parts of the body in isolation which is how one proceeds in the biomechanical model.

³³ It’s best to think of the midline here as the spine, although it’s a bit more complicated than that.

³⁴ Discussed on page 19.

³⁵ We will return to this in the discussion on stillpoints, beginning page 19.

³⁶ Which gave its name ‘khemia’ to alchemy (Hillman, 2015, 21%).

³⁷ Connectivity was tied in with the heart, about which I say more in chapter 3.

To the Egyptians, the dismemberment of Osiris symbolically expressed his loss of connection. Isis, through her grief and love has the power to re-establish it; her mourning emphasizes both her marital and sibling tie with him and also her recognition of his current loss and isolation. She does this by detailing the exact features of his current situation in her moving poetic laments (ibid., p.119). In this she acts rather like a living mirror, setting up a powerful resonance with him through her incantatory power.

Silver Mirror

As the craniosacral therapist tunes into the body, they will perceive the patterns of health and disturbance in the body. By disturbance I am referring back to those inertial fulcra and their manifestations; by health I mean primarily the sense of coherent motion in the body discussed in the last chapter. Treatment involves barely more than the listening I described in the tuning in process. As the patterns ebb and flow you ‘intuitively respond’ and ‘let your entrained hands precisely move with, or mirror, the motion that is present’ (Ridley, 2006, 39%). For this mirroring to be complete, Ridley encourages what he calls a ‘tonal match.’ One subtly modulates one’s presence to harmonize with the feeling tone of the activity in the client’s body (ibid., 42%). He states: ‘The capacity to coherently resonate with the tone is the key that unlocks the mystery of biodynamic cranial work’ (ibid., 67%).

This resonating presence requires an open heart which can be challenging. This is especially the case in the watery world of the fluid tide, where the two systems have become one. Here, ‘the effect of the client’s psychic (or emotional) body deeply touches your heart,’ and ‘you “suffer with” your client’ (ibid., 41%). Here again the therapist is assuming a lunar, mediating role. ‘The moon, as the star nearest to the earth, partakes of the earth and its sufferings’ (Jung, CW 14:173). Furthermore, you may ‘have to reckon with your own unresolved emotional issues that co-resonate with the client’s process’ (ibid.,41%;).³⁸ In order not to get swept away it is essential for the therapist to maintain a ‘mixture of firmness and softness’ (ibid., 44%) rather like ‘a tree that is firmly rooted in the ground, yet flexible enough to freely sway with the tumultuous winds’ (ibid., 41%). Similarly, in his discussion of the albedo Hillman describes the ‘solid receptivity’ of the silver mirror, and emphasizes that one can only mirror ‘what one can receive and to which one is solidly present within the limits of one’s own borders (Hillman, 2015, 35%).

Stillness: Empowering the Body’s Intelligence

As the therapist continues to listen to and subtly mirror the patterns of the body, the client’s system works toward a ‘state of balanced tension,’ and ‘the tissues

³⁸ Daska Hatton also draws attention to this (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.39).

begin to float in buoyancy' (ibid., 63%). Gradually it can feel as if the system is settling into deeper and deeper states of balance, until a stillness descends over and within the whole. This can manifest as a sense that time is slowing down or stopping. This strange but wonderful feeling is what is known as a stillpoint. What has happened is that the rhythmic tides of the body have stopped. This is very significant because it liberates the power or 'potency' of the Breath of Life to engage in deep healing processes. Sills supports Sutherland's belief that 'it is within the *stillness* of the Tide that its power resides' (Sills, 2001, p.121). This is somewhat similar to the potency in the eye of a hurricane (Becker, 2001, p.84).

Although there is stillness, that does not mean absence of movement, stillness is alive and dynamic, and it is more that the movement feels contained within the stillness. In fact, there can be a sense of great activity. One can feel a 'balanced interchange between potency, tissues, and fluids' (Ridley, 2006, 63%), or a series of energetic fingers or waves driving toward different areas of the body (the fluid drive), moving in first one direction then another. What you are feeling is the potency of the Breath of Life re-ordering, re-balancing and re-aligning the body. Being tuned into this process is amazing as what you seem to be experiencing is transmutation and healing actually taking place, within the body. This healing is not directed by the therapist but by some unseen force, what has often been called an 'intelligence in the body.' Sills puts it like this: 'the body... already has all the information it needs to heal and maintain a balanced state...There is an Intelligence at work...This Intelligence knows what to do' (Sills, 2001, p.8). In reaching a stillpoint, one achieves maximum receptivity and cooperation in the unfolding process. One is truly a mediator, where active and passive are in perfect balance.

A Gentle Dew: Transmutation

Stillpoints can feel quite magical and are the cranial equivalent of the 'falling dew' of the albedo. This dew signifies the alchemical change from nigredo to albedo, the change in state that arises. How do we normally recognize this change in state and how does it show up craniosacrally? Hillman describes the mood shift of the albedo:

whitening frequently comes first as an experience of emotional relief, a lightening after blackness and leaden despair, as if something else is there besides; within the misery, the tremor of a bird. Burnout cools; the ida stream of Kundalini showers the exhausted soul with gentle dew.³⁹ A mood dulcet, a descending grace...We say: "It's lifted" - not so heavy, not so frantic... there is a new sense of trust... [which] feels rather like sweet anticipations of another chance...and that one can go on because somewhere down the line there is a holding place (Hillman, 2015, 44%)

³⁹ The dew is associated with the moistening and cleansing moon. 'Luna secretes the dew or sap of life' (Jung, CW 14:155)

The albedo marks the first turning point; things are not resolved and there is a lot of work to be done, but there is a first glimmer that things might be okay because there is sensed a place other than the black, a 'holding place,' a sweet, maternal 'refuge' (ibid., 44%).

This shift can be felt in the body following the processes described above. The 'fluid body as a whole expands' and 'the body 'feels lighter in weight-buoyant' (Ridley, 2006, 43%). There may be 'warmth, softening, expansion, or bubbling' (ibid., 43%). Shock effects and trauma may dissipate out of the body as subtle tremblings and shakings and streamings of energies (Sills, 2001, p.358). Fulcra will 'reorient toward the midline' like a 'sailboat whose sails reorient to catch the breeze' and 'thereby transmute inertial motion into healthy motion' (Ridley, 2006, 39%). From the client's point of view the he or she will usually feel an increase in lightness and spaciousness. Following a session it sometimes happens that clients will report feeling as if they are slightly looking down on themselves, as if there is some psychic distance which frees them to disidentify with and develop a better relationship with the blackness that is still there.

Incubation: Fire in the Water⁴⁰

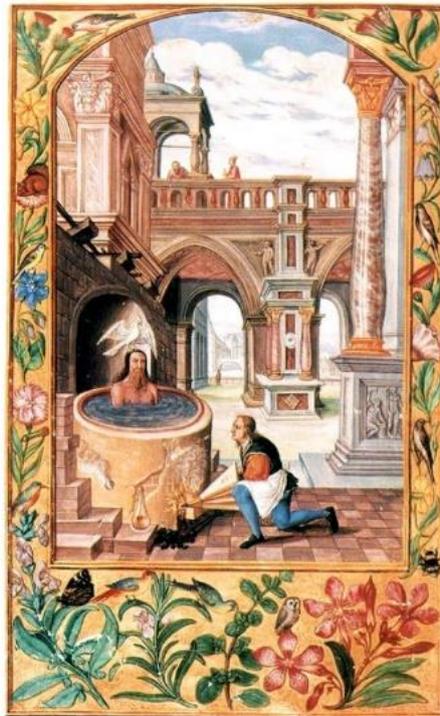


Plate from *The Splendour Solis* by Solomon Trismosin
Accessed on 21/09/20 from the Ingenious Animal Oracle

⁴⁰ My thanks to Fred Burniston for bringing the practice of incubation to my attention in connection to craniosacral therapy.

The above image shows the common alchemical theme of the king in his sweat bath. All the healing elements of water, fire and air are present. I'd like now to look at the preceding processes in another way, one that fits still with the watery, lunar albedo, but also with what I believe to be the best way of characterizing the whole craniosacral healing process: namely incubation. This involves introducing the second of the elements of nourishment and healing: that of fire. In alchemy this often combines with the water, its elemental opposite.⁴¹ Jung gives us some examples of the hero or sinner being plunged in a fiery, watery womb space, for example a cleansing baptism (Jung, CW 14:316), in the sweat bath of the king (Jung CW 12:441n) and the belly of the dragon or whale⁴² (ibid., 437 & 440). These immersions are all a simultaneous death and renewal.⁴³ Jung sees the heat involved as incubatory:

The "hidden fire" forms the inner antithesis to the cold wetness of the sea... this heat is undoubtedly the warmth of incubation, equivalent to the self-incubating or "brooding" state of meditation. In Indian yoga we find the kindred idea of tapas, self-incubation. The aim of tapas is... transformation and resurrection (Jung, CW 12:441).

The image of incubation can be found in scenes relating to the healing and resurrection of Osiris. Roberts describes how in Hathor's temple of Dendera Osiris is shown incubating in two seedbeds as Osiris vegetans and Osiris-Sokar (Roberts, 2019, pp.101-102). As Osiris-Sokar he is placed in an egg created out of pulverized precious stones, dates, myrrh and aromatic substances. The egg develops through 'a circulating process associated with the sun's passage through the zodiac and Orion's journey through Nut's womb (ibid., p.112). Thus, Osiris is incubating and gestating in an egg in Nut's womb and is given both water and heat for his growth. The texts tell us that the 'seeds need heat, and Osiris needs heat' (ibid., p.112). The egg is exposed to the sun which eventually 'brings colour' (ibid., p.112). The Osireion at Abydos shows a similar regenerative passage through Nut's body where both water and fire strongly feature as transformative elements (Roberts, 2000, chaps.9-12).

This conception of death (descent) as a return to the womb or body of the mother was prevalent in Egyptian culture (Assmann, 2005, pp.172-173). In their mortuary thinking the coffin, tomb, necropolis and the West were all synonymous with the great mother (ibid., p.171). 'In all these welcoming and embracing forms' she offered 'security, eternal renewal, air, water, and nourishment', embodying the 'tree of life' that dispenser of eternal nourishment to the deceased (ibid., p.171) whom she welcomes as her child (ibid., p.166). Jung similarly describes the 'critical transformation' in the alchemical text the *Cantilena*:

⁴¹ See also Jung (CW 12:338) where he says they played the same role i.e. transforming.

⁴² Where the 'heat there is usually so intense that the hero loses his hair' (Jung, CW 12:440).

⁴³ See Jung on baptism as a kind of death (CW 14:316).

Chemically speaking, the “mother” overflowing with milk and tears is the solution, the “mother liquid” or matrix. She is the “water” in which the old king...is dissolved into atoms. Here he is described as a *foetus in utero*. The dissolution signifies his death, and the uterus...becomes his grave... At this moment something of... a miracle occurs: the material solution loses its earthy heaviness, and solvent and solute together pass into a higher state...namely the albedo (Jung, CW 14:434).

The practice of incubation as a form of healing was widespread in the ancient world (Meier, 2012, 58%). C.A. Meier describes this therapeutic practice in his *Healing Dream and Ritual* (2012), for example in the sanctuaries of Asclepius, the legendary son of Apollo and a god of healing (Meier, 2012, 19%). Asclepius was traditionally taught his healing by the centaur (half man-half horse) Chiron (ibid., 18%). Meier highlights that the dual nature of Chiron symbolizes the human, scientific side along with the ‘practical side of medicine’ which is ‘to be understood by the irrational part...(the horse)’ (ibid., 18%). He concludes that ‘medical practice would have an essential connection with the irrational’ (ibid., 18%). It seems that many ancients saw non-rational elements (often also envisaged as dogs and serpents) as essential to healing. In craniosacral therapy the body is the non-rational element that yet seems to possess intelligent forces within it, as I’m presenting in this chapter. The other feature of Asclepius to which I’d like to draw brief attention is that according to Meier ‘Asclepius can hardly be thought of without his feminine companions, his wife and daughters’ (ibid., 22%); it seems they collaborated in the healing. The image at the front of this essay illustrates Asclepius surrounded by females, perhaps his family, perhaps including a female deity standing behind him. As with the healing of Osiris, the feminine presence seems to perform a critical role.

The ritualistic incubation process had a ‘nocturnal character’ along with considerable birth symbolism, giving it ‘the character of a mystery’ (ibid., 79%). Firstly the sick person or incubant, received a cleansing bath (ibid., 37%), which had the meaning of ‘a voluntary death, and of a rebirth’ (ibid., 50%).⁴⁴ Water ‘played an important part throughout the cult of Asclepius’ (ibid., 47%) in the form of springs, fountains and bathing pools. In most places the incubants were then ‘strictly enjoined to wear white linen bands and white garments’ (ibid., 72%), which, along with the water symbolism fittingly reflects the lunar symbolism of the albedo phase we are exploring. Meier interprets the garments as a ‘visible sign of transfiguration’, a “‘putting on the new man’” (ibid., 72%), indicating a transformative process was to take place.

During the incubation itself which took place at night, the incubant laid down on a couch in an *adyton*, meaning ‘place not to be entered unbidden’ (ibid., 38%). The *adyton* was an inner chamber in the sanctuary or sometimes a cave. There, the

⁴⁴ Meier comments that his theme was even more marked in the incubation rites of Trophonius (ibid., 70%). There is the process of ‘being thrust in and out again through the hole’ akin to a ‘process of death and birth’ (ibid., 70%), and the incubants are wrapped in swaddling clothes like an infant and often ‘fed on infant food, especially cheese, milk and honey’ (ibid., 70%).

incubants were generally to go to sleep (ibid., 58%), although occasionally they stayed awake (ibid., 53%). There, sometimes attended by priests, they were brought to 'stillness.' The exact nature of this is unclear but it seems it involved an altered state and a divine encounter, usually through a dream or vision (Kingsley, 1999, p.180). Sometimes Asclepius appeared, in human or theriomorphic form (dog or serpent), in which case 'the incubant was always cured' (Meier, 2012, 39%). Hardly anything in the way of intervention seems to have taken place but intriguingly, there may have been some healing through touch (Meier, 2012, 39%). It is perhaps hard for us to imagine how illness could have been healed in this way, with its lack of rational diagnosis and corresponding remedy, the features that we would normally recognise as being effective. It seems that incubation relied on more non-rational factors; the dreams and images just mentioned, feeling, intuition, the setting up of an appropriate atmosphere, aligning with and being graced by the divine. The incubants were given an experience whereby they seemed to be transported into an altogether different, mysterious, and healing space.

Incubation: The Body as Vessel of Renewal

The experience of heat can arise in craniosacral work via the therapist's hands during the tuning in process and in a kind of 'healing heat' in the client's body as certain processes unfold, particularly if they are intense. However, I want to rather focus on a more metaphorical kind of heat, the incubatory heat we have been discussing akin to the heat of the egg or womb. Consider first that in the therapist's hand (and heart) contact with the client, the therapist is 'lending' their energy to the client's process, enabling their body to make changes it might not have enough energy to do so by itself. Furthermore, the therapist is 'holding' the body and its process just as the alchemical vessel (womb) holds the transforming substances. The therapist as 'Luna' facilitates the space in which the body is able to renew itself in states of balance and stillness. In fact it might be more accurate to say that the therapist and body together comprise the lunar vessel, as treatment consists as we have seen in a cooperation between the receptive awareness of the therapist and an intelligence in the body. This vision of the body as womb feels appropriate to me as biodynamic theory emphasizes that the same forces that brought us into life are continuing to act throughout our lives (Sills, 2001, p.50). Accessing these and assisting their expression is the key to biodynamic craniosacral healing process. This principle is reinforced in the next section.

Long Tide: Surrendering to Divine Intentions?

Tune to your Silent Partner ... surrender and thereby become a participant in the process already going on...The act of *surrendering* as a *participant* into the *unknown* does all the work (Becker, 2001, p.250)

Here we explore what can happen when we deepen further into stillness and introduce the fourth element (third transforming element) of air. In her coffin/womb, Nut ensured that Osiris had air for his lungs, and Isis fanned air into him with her wings to conceive Horus Roberts, 2000, p.140). It seemed to form a vital part of his journey through the Duat, his 6th hour of resurrection in fact (ibid, pp.139-140).

Ridley writes that, as the stillness encountered in the mid-tide deepens, ‘you will feel a massive increase in levity vastly expand the space in the client’s body until all movement stops.’ Simultaneously: ‘an extraordinarily deep stillness enters from outside,’ which is the ‘prelude to long tide’ (Ridley, 2006, 66%). The long tide is a much more vast and slow rhythm that ‘breathes a one hundred-second cycle’ (Sills, 2001, p.54) during which ‘the client’s fluid body begins to transmute into a vast, sublime vapor’ (Ridley, 2006, 44%) or potency. The most distinctive feature of the long tide is the fact that it seems to emerge almost ‘from outside the room’ (ibid., 44%) and your perception naturally shifts toward the horizon’ (ibid., 44%). This is a fairly awesome experience when it happens and if as the practitioner you are not prepared for it you can feel in a slight panic as to how to respond. In fact all you have to do is continue in the receptive mode already discussed: ‘Your job is to rest within the vast ocean of potency that is long tide, and to continue to yield control of the session to the client’s internal forces’ (ibid., 44%), or the ‘Silent Partner’ of Becker’s initial quote.

Ridley tells us that these very deep tidal enfoldments ‘do not appear on command’ (ibid., 45%). Instead long tide arises more like a grace, and can indeed appear as ‘a loving, radiant presence’ (ibid., 45%). This mix of deep stillness, power and presence can bring intimations of the divine. Rollin Becker, who coined the term ‘long tide’ describes his experience of it:

you are suddenly conscious that the whole room in which you are working seems to become a pause-rest period, and there is something there, a Stillness, that is above and beyond anything you can explain to yourself or to the patient. There is a feeling of being close to your Maker’ (Becker, 1997, p.30).

In long tide one is that much closer to the breath of life, which is possibly why the tide feels more vaporous and air-like.⁴⁵ It is as if the body carries within it an original blueprint or bioelectric matrix (Sills, 2001, pp. 62-63), an ideal self or state to which it is always trying to return, or a set of instructions or intentions it is working to follow. Sills believes the long tide expresses the original intentions of the creator. We can also think of it as Maat, the goddess of ‘wisdom’ who regulated, guided and ordered the solar expression (Roberts, 2019, p.19).⁴⁶ The ‘womb’ of the long tide, in line with its greater depth, generates a more massive

⁴⁵ The breath of life is operating all the time, but in long tide its ‘winds’ are more easily felt.

⁴⁶ She guided the sun and the sun boat on its day journey; it was essential to keep to her way or chaos would reign. See Naydler (1996, 16%).

i.e. comprehensive healing process. Here the practitioner just lets the body's intelligence or with its 'inherent treatment plan' take over, as it is impossible to follow and mirror everything that is happening.

Although it would be extremely hard to prove (and many cranial practitioners themselves would resist) the notion that there is anything 'divine' going on in long, or any other tide, there is no doubt that the above process is of a non-rational nature. There is no working out rationally what to do; as in the ancient practice of incubation one simply deepens into a still, quiet space and lets the hidden wisdom of the body emerge and unfold.

Chapter 3: The Yellowing: Citrinitas

Come back to find parcel been delivered - another cupboard. I note I already have one but am pleased. As I continue to look around things change. I note there is a single bed making more space. Then more cupboards become evident, inbuilt ones and standing ones, some Ikea like with plain wood some painted over yellow which I'm not so keen on. The room seems to get bigger. I go to the back of the room and open some fold back doors and realize I can sit on a grassy slope just in front of me and see the sea which at this moment is sparkling and glimmering btm trees in the moonlight. Someone is sitting there now and I think about the doors which are not solid (Feb 1999)

In the dream above I find myself in an increasingly large space with plenty of cupboards i.e. storage. It was quite common for me in dreams at the time to find myself in a new house, bedroom or kitchen. In one dream I noted that the kitchen had enough space to seat people but not enough for the cooking appliances, in a later dream kitchen I observed that there were. I like to think of these rooms and houses as my body, in which I had then (and now), through my cranial work, acquired enough 'space' to move and process things - the cooking, for example, may refer to alchemical 'cooking' processes. My body seemed to be gaining capacity, and furthermore joining up with the rest of the world, as evidenced by the soft boundary between the house and the landscape. Yet the landscape has a lunar light, so it is as if I am on the boundary between the albedo and citrinitas phases. I seem unsure about the cupboards painted yellow, as if they are a bit disturbing, introducing a note of ambivalence.

What is the Yellow Stage?

The yellow stage in alchemy is not often written about or pictured as much as the other stages, and in later texts, is often missed out altogether (Jung, CW 12:333). It is thus harder to say what is going on in this phase of the work, and what it meant to the alchemists themselves. One writer who has given the yellow stage some deep thought is the psychologist James Hillman in his volume *Alchemical Psychology* (2015), and I want to combine his interpretation of the yellowing with the reflections of two craniosacral therapists, one of whom was my craniosacral

therapist for a few years. Liz Kalinowska and Daska Hatton have jointly written an unusual book; *Every Body Tells a Story* (2016), which presents a series of sessions between an imaginary therapist and client, providing the opportunity to explore the perspectives of each over a period of time.

Like alchemy, which was known as a 'longissima via'⁴⁷ (Eliade, 1978, p.163) craniosacral work involves more of an ongoing, repeating, spiral process, with the changes needing to be integrated, grounded and 'firmly embodied' at every stage (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.143). Just as there are shallower and deeper tides in the body the craniosacral journey itself takes place on several levels and time zones. There is the change in the single session, the series of sessions that comprise a course of treatment (which may be over weeks, months, or years), and the body's continuing journey over one's life. I am taking the yellow stage as the process by which the changes are integrated back into the body, and back into a person's life. This can feel as if the sun is coming out, but can also feel quite bumpy, and doesn't happen just once, but every time changes occur.

Warming the Albedo: Revivification

In his *Alchemical Psychology*, James Hillman takes us through all the colours of the alchemical opus, exploring their physical and psychological associations and their meaning in terms of the alchemical stages each represents. The colour yellow he describes as having a host of 'cheerfully sunny implications' reminiscent of 'ripening grains, spring flowers, honey, sunlight' (Hillman, 2015, 58%). The yellow signifies a transition from the white albedo to the rubedo (ibid., 59%), and as such it 'brings life' (ibid., 60%), 'an increase in warmth' and a 'conversion from inside to outside' (ibid., 59%), that is, a movement out into the world. This is the qualitative change from white into yellow.

Hillman tells us it can be tempting to remain in the realm of white silvery reflections, the safe cocooned therapeutic space where one is able to regard things at one remove, and I must admit to a mental and emotional predilection for this stage. Yet Hillman quotes Jung here: "But in this state of 'whiteness' one does not *live*" (ibid., 60%). Instead the yellowing calls the soul 'from the chill lunar reflection of the albedo into a combustible fusion with the warm-bodied objects of desire' (ibid., 59%). One comes out into the day and into the sunlight, and here there emerges a 'brighter, more vivifying illumination, a richer, more expansive clarity' (ibid., 60%).

I would like to find out a bit more. What causes the warming and what is it that helps us out from the lunar twilight into the day? I'd like to return to the healing of Osiris for illumination, especially as that takes us back into the body. During the albedo Osiris' limbs were gathered and tied back together through the

⁴⁷ A most long road or way.

activities of Isis. However, he ‘still needs to find ‘his capacity to move and feel’ i.e. he needs to recover his heart, for it is the heart that ‘commands the activity of the bodily members’ (Roberts, 2019, p.110),⁴⁸ and is the source of a person’s ‘emotional and cognitive inner life’ (Assmann, 2005, p.29). For the Egyptians the heart was the centralizing organ that integrated the body, the ‘guarantor or generator of connectivity in the bodily sphere’ (ibid., p.13). The heart ‘united the limbs and animated the body’ (ibid., p.28).

We recall that Osiris became dissociated from his heart when he was attacked which was expressed as his heart being ‘tired.’ In such a state it ‘fails to perform its centralizing function’ (ibid., p.28). How is he to recover its life-giving energy? Again, he receives help, this time from Hathor, the powerful solar female deity whose role seems to be to provide maternal life-giving nourishment and vitality to gods and kings.⁴⁹ Roberts expresses it thus:

if he [Osiris] is truly to be ‘rebuilt’, if he is to grow, develop, flourish... he needs to be attuned to the life-giving rhythms of his mother’s heartbeat ... as it is ultimately from his mother that his ‘not-tired’ heart derives (Roberts, 2019, p.110).

In having his heart reawakened, Osiris recovers his vitality which appears to include both his libido (and therefore power to create new life), and his capacity to move. As a newly integrated whole he is able to experience attraction, motivation and to command his limbs accordingly.

So, it seems that the warming principle here is the heart. This is not that surprising considering that in the Hermetic chain of correspondences the sun, the heart and fire (whose heat is turned up here) are all linked. Is there a corresponding change of state in craniosacral therapy? Following the resolution of inertial fulcra, the changes feed back into the rest of the body. The reciprocal nature of the body means local changes affect the whole and therefore everything eases. There is an increase in vitality as the energy that was occupied in centering the inertial fulcra is released to flow back into the system. The heart is freer to perform its role as primary natural fulcrum for the whole body, and one can correspondingly feel more upbeat and more motivated to engage with the world. There can literally be an increase in warmth as circulation is improved, and a sense of greater spaciousness and openness arises as one is no longer so bound up. My dream of the large, capacious house seems to reflect this increase in space, ease and openness to the environment.

Back to Black: Re-integration

Two dreams where going up and down large house. One where in Julie next Doors house which I am in walking up staircases looking for my yellow

⁴⁸ ‘The Egyptians recognized the function of the blood and blood vessels in integrating the limbs into a body’ (Assmann, 2005, p.12).

⁴⁹ For example, we see her providing life, motion and feeling to the gods Shu and Tefnut (Roberts, 2000, p.22). See also her assistance of Re (ibid., p.161), and of Horus to soar heavenwards on his wings (ibid., p.158).

jumper. There is activity round about (Feb 1999)

So far it all sounds wonderful, and indeed it is a magnificent moment when - as I am able to do now - I feel myself tune into a wounded place that has arisen in my mind-body, feel myself being bathed in nurturing, oceanic winds, and follow in my awareness the forces and knots of disturbance dissolving and dissipating out, restoring balance and wholeness. At such times I feel that this is the best and most complete kind of therapy and I wish everyone could experience its gentle, subtle, power and healing. But there are other moments, and it is these I'm discussing in this section.

Often, our return to the world and the body is more complicated than a simple 'sun coming out' image would suggest. This journey is frequently uncomfortable and involves some unwelcome experiences and realizations. It can seem as if things have become spoiled as, no longer distanced, emotions surface, and things can 'flare up or rot, or just generally go wrong' (Hillman, 2015, 59%). This is a different type of yellow from the yellow of spring flowers, one which includes some black and is associated with 'corruption and decay' (ibid., 58%). This decay is of the sort that happens as white ages. 'The process of time shows as a yellowing' (ibid., 58%), but according to Hillman this is a necessary prelude to the rubedo. Alchemy is about working with ourselves as embodied beings, and our purified soul and spirit has to come back together with our bodies. What might this process look like in craniosacral work?

Kalinowska and Hatton describe how their imaginary client Anna has several sessions of craniosacral therapy with (imaginary) craniosacral therapist Sarah, in which she enters a deep state of peace and relaxation. This has positive effects on both her own states of stress and exhaustion and her family life, with the result that she gains a 'brief, tantalizing glimpse into another more exciting world of new possibilities and wider horizons' (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.145). But then following one session she has a bad row with her husband, and experiences huge disappointment: 'it seemed so desperately cruel to her that what had appeared so magical had now turned out to have made no difference at all' (ibid., p.145). Sarah reflects on this predicament:

[Anna] was beginning to believe that this flight into dream and fantasy in which the real, difficult world had been left behind was what Craniosacral Therapy was all about. She thought that a few hours on the table had dissolved most of her difficulties, and she had been looking forward to the escape that she had found in the last session. Her disappointment at having to revisit old feelings of sadness ...is particularly deep and painful, as she had hoped that the feelings had magically disappeared.' (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.149)

Because craniosacral therapy can take you into a deep space unlike almost any other (ibid., p.4) and you can afterwards feel better without apparently having had to do any work oneself, it can seem very magical. One can start to have

visions of a life where all one's problems and difficulties have disappeared, and one is a different person. Then something can happen that makes one think, 'oh, I've still got that pattern, issue, feeling, etc. I'm still me! Nothing's changed.' Sometimes finding oneself in the old pattern feels worse, because growth in awareness makes it stand out all the more clearly. Hillman writes: 'the yellow brings the pain of knowledge itself. The soul suffers its understanding' (Hillman, 2015, 60%).

In fact, over time there may be many oscillations between feeling that things have changed, and that things have not. Experiencing old feelings and behaviour patterns, though it can feel 'like a regression' (ibid., 60%), will form part of the integrating process over time during which change is 'assimilated at every level - mental, physical and emotional' (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.69). This is where our work as clients comes in.⁵⁰ The alchemists had a concept they named 'iteratio', the endless repetition of the same process, deemed necessary to the formation of the philosopher's stone. In this way our changes are thoroughly grounded, and we may come to express the 'green-yellow of *chloris*, which for the Greeks described the earth goddess Demeter' (Hillman, 2015, 58%).

In the dream above I am running up and down houses, looking for a yellow jumper, which I believe I visualized as a bright lemon yellow. This was one of many dreams I had of going up or down things, such as mountains, ridges and buildings etc. I was usually accompanied by someone who wanted to go to the top, but I was always uncomfortable and preferred to stay somewhere in the middle. Jung informs us that this motif 'occurs very frequently in dreams' and interprets it like this:

Ascent and descent, above and below, up and down, represent an emotional realization of opposites, and this realization gradually leads... to their equilibrium ...It corresponds to the struggle between the winged and the wingless dragon (Jung, CW 14:296).

The winged and wingless dragon or bird occur in many treatises such as the manuscript *Aurora Consurgens* and is also a motif to be found in Egyptian temple decoration (Roberts, 2019, chap.14). I begin to see the 'struggle' between the birds or dragons as Jung describes it and my struggle to find my yellow jumper as the emotional oscillations I have described above: the struggle to integrate the positive, light and life-giving changes back into the body. The likelihood is to end up neither completely in the light and sun, or back in the nigredo but somewhere midway.

We have to accept that whatever positive changes take place, on some level we will always remain the same person, and 'might always be susceptible to thinking, feeling or behaving in particular ways' (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, p.195). Our

⁵⁰ Yet hopefully supported by our therapist!

prima materia, determined by our genus, our background, and our nature, allows us to go only so far, and the limits will be different for each person. In the case of our anxieties for example, the best that can sometimes be achieved is to ‘reach a different relationship with them’ and use our newfound awareness and resources to ‘become more adept at handling them’ (ibid., p.145). My dream of the large house with increasing storage seems to suggest that I was gaining resources. This is extremely valuable in itself, though perhaps not the perfect state we might have begun to envision for ourselves.

Repeating Cycles

In summary the yellow stage seems to represent a transition from both white to red but also back to black. It reflects the flood of energy released back into the body that warms and vitalizes but also the grounding that occurs, sometimes painfully, as we move back into the world. It testifies to both alchemy and craniosacral therapy as a repeating and cyclical process.

[‘Nigredo states] are beginnings because they are endings, dissolutions, deconstructions. But they are not the beginning, as a one-time-only occurrence.’ ‘the alchemical process...is not a unidirectional model... It is an *iteratio*; black repeats in order for the deconstruction to continue’ (Hillman, 2015, 22%).

The sun comes out and we feel our wings stirring and ready to soar, but life works to keep our feet firmly planted on the ground. ‘I see that the cycle has come around another time and will no doubt do so yet again’ (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2015, p.135).

Chapter 4: The Rubedo

I give birth to a baby. We are in immediate relationship and the whole thing feels delightful. Our eyes meet in a hopeful, slightly shy, excited and expectant way (Jan 1998)

Balancing the Opposites: Osiris Renewed

The dream above seems to promise the awakening of new life. A similar theme seems to be expressed at the end of my skeleton king dream. There we saw a shift in scene whereby huge gates opened to reveal a noble, young prince. At the time I tended to see him as an Egyptian prince but that meant little to me at the time; having immersed myself in Egyptian mythology and iconography it now has many more resonances. The only association I really had with the actors mentioned was that I perceived them as somewhat androgynous. This is reminiscent of the hermaphrodite, one of the images of the transfigured substance and implying a balancing or merging of opposites. I now see the ‘prince’ as Horus, who is also the resurrected Osiris.

The renewal of Osiris is complete; he is reunited with his limbs; he is upright and stable; his heart has been reawakened and is now able to infuse him with vitality -

as depicted in his title ‘Osiris Wennefer’; and he has recovered his sexual power and fertility. The result of this as revealed in the Book of the Night is that a child is born, an archetypal symbol of renewal and rebirth. Osiris himself has undergone a second birth into divinity, and he is now free to move between heaven and earth, life and death, bridging these opposites. His power to combat enemies is also restored, reflected in his son Horus’ defeat of Seth.

In the myth we saw that Horus had to occupy the throne of Egypt and re-establish Maat by defeating Seth who embodied the forces of chaos. I likened this conflict to the tension between the opposing forces of the inertial and natural fulcra in the body. In some versions of the myth Seth is not so much driven out as held in check, in balance. He is then able to assist in the defeat of the Apophis snake, another destabilizing influence.⁵¹ I think I prefer this version, as it reflects my experience that when inertial forces in the body are resolved, one comes out stronger rather than weaker. It is as if something has been integrated rather than left, and it feels easier to ‘command’ one’s limbs and energies.

The processes of craniosacral therapy have enabled a similar transmutation and renewal to that of Osiris. Vitality and motion have been restored. There is a re-balancing as places of hardness and rigidity become softer, and weak, insubstantial areas grow in solidity, strength, and presence. There is an ability to meet challenges more flexibly and resourcefully. Most significantly, the tissues and fluids orientate back to the midline, and the original matrix is re-established. This means the person is freer to express more of their individual, unique self, which now shines out more clearly and fully. This I believe reflects the spirit of the *rubedo* to which I now turn.

The Alchemical Rubedo

The last of the four main alchemical colours, the red colour known as the *rubedo*, signals the last stage of the opus, ‘the birth of the alchemical gold’ (Greene, 2006, p.142). It marks ‘the complete transmutation of the original substance’ (Roberts, 2019, p.188), which has now become the philosopher’s stone. In terms of the solar cycle, the *rubedo* ‘is associated with the dawn and with solar light’ (Greene, 2006, p.143). Jung says: ‘The *albedo* [whitening] is, so to speak, the daybreak, but not till the *rubedo* is it sunrise’ (Jung, *CW* 12:333-334). So it seems that the *rubedo* has to do with the qualitative state symbolized by gold and the sun, correspondences in the great chain of being. Gold is also the clothing of the divine, the colour Osiris takes on as he is transmuted into ‘a divine golden body’ and reborn ‘as the ‘Glorious One’ (*Akh*)’ (Roberts, 2019, p.102).

Hillman says that the ‘operations coincident to the reddening are exaltation, multiplication, and projection’ (Hillman, 2015, 61%). Let’s look at the second two

⁵¹ In the solar cycle the figures on the sun barge including Seth are threatened by Apophis during the hottest part of the day. They have to fiercely resist if they are to stay on the course set by Maat (Roberts, 2019, p.24).

projectio and *multiplicatio* which seem closely related. I look at the *exaltatio* in my concluding section. We have already observed during the yellow stage, the extraverted movement out into the world, and the *projectio* completes this movement.⁵² Out in the world the lapis is to multiply, that is, magically transform what it touches. The gold is to flow into the landscape and nourish others. Mythologically, the Egyptian land becomes fruitful again following the resurrection of Osiris, and it often seems the *rubedo* was as much a ‘greening’ as a reddening.⁵³ In alchemical imagery the *rubedo* was often pictured as the pelican pecking its breast to feed its young, or as Sophia breast feeding the philosophers.

In Anna’s more human story, we see the *multiplicatio* in the way the positive changes in her, feed into her environment, and she comes to realize that ‘the work we were doing together ‘could influence not just her but also the dynamics of the whole family’ (Kalinowska and Hatton, 2016, 62%). In my own story the *projectio* seems implicated in some comments I made following the start of a new job. In May 2001 I report that I ‘have much more energy’ and am ‘much happier, more comfortable in my present work role’ and that I am taking a much greater interest ‘in the community and the world’ and a desire ‘to get involved’. I also report ‘an explosion of interest in art’ and ‘colour’.

Visible Expressions of Health: the Stone as Moving Crystal

Later am entering a place with lots of openings, doors, tunnels, rather potent feel about the place, mysterious. I go down into it, in one door, or perhaps following me - I don’t think I’m supposed to be there, is a goblin -like man - I go further on - in the cavernous place and find a bowl filled with a liquid that keeps changing colour in a very bright, beautiful, magical way (Nov 2000).

The alchemical work has been progressing, and each colour has marked a change in state, but it is only in the *rubedo* that the changes become visible. Just as when the sun shines and the landscape is illuminated to its greatest effect, the *rubedo* is ‘a luminous power making ‘the invisible visible’, the ‘inner’ ‘outer’ (Roberts, 2019, p.188).⁵⁴ ‘Suddenly everything glows with a lustre that shines forth from within, a revelation of maturity and fullness as the work comes to completion’ (ibid., p.188). Part of what appealed to the ancients about gold and copper was their shining, radiant qualities, in line with the sun as discussed above. In Egypt it was Hathor that gave minerals and gods their radiant qualities (Roberts, 2000, p.27), and I’d like to end this chapter by shining a ‘Hathorian’ light on the organism.

The dream above with its image of changing coloured liquid, ‘bright, beautiful and magical’ may at the time have signified new possibilities for me, an indication that I could enter a new, more fulfilling phase of life. In line with the themes of this essay I’d like to link it now with another image of bright changing colours

⁵² Although as we have seen processes never really come to a complete standstill but enter another cycle (see yellow section).

⁵³ See Roberts (2019, pp.112-113).

⁵⁴ See also Roberts (2019, p.95)

described by the biologist Mae-wan Ho in her book on the physics of organisms, *The Rainbow and the Worm* (2003). Undertaking what she believes to be the 'first ever high resolution and high contrast imaging of an entire, living, moving organism' (Ho, 2003, p.165) she describes her first sight of a *Drosophila* larva⁵⁵ viewed under a polarizing microscope on a special setting⁵⁶:

As it crawls along, it weaves its head from side to side flashing jaw muscles in blue and orange stripes on a magenta background. The segmental muscle bands switch from brilliant turquoise to bright vermillion... The contracting body-wall turns from magenta to purple, through to iridescent shades of green, orange and yellow ...Within the posterior abdomen, fluorescent yellow malpighian tubules come in and out of focus like decorative ostrich feathers... (ibid., p.164)

Ho explains that the 'colour generated and its intensity (brightness) depend on the structure of the particular molecules... *and their degree of coherent order*' (ibid., p.177). The brightest parts of the organism are always the 'most actively moving parts' as these will be moving the most coherently (ibid., p.177). In contrast, the 'colours fade when the organism dies or becomes inactive due to dehydration or to the cold'⁵⁷ (ibid., p.166). I find it fascinating to think that colour here, is the direct expression of the life and energy⁵⁸, motion and coherence of a living being. It follows that an increase in motion and coherence, the two major signs of health in the craniosacral system, will lead to an increase in colour radiance, an increase of the 'lustre that shines forth from within'. In my introduction I said I would like to find an alternative image of the philosopher's stone and I think I have it here: an image of a supremely colourful, shifting and moving, crystal.

PART 3: CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding chapters we saw Osiris transformed from a dismembered, 'tired,' and inertial state in the nigredo to one where he was restored to unity, vitality, and mobility in the rubedo. This involved deepening into a womb-like, incubatory condition where he was nourished with all the energies and elements of life by his sisters and mothers and restored to balance and dignity by his son. I have tried to show that biodynamic craniosacral therapy involves a similar regenerative journey, through the listening, entrained hands and heart of the therapist and facilitation of the inherent healing forces of the body. Although laying hands on a body is a very different procedure from heating substances in a flask, I believe it accords with the spirit of alchemy, especially in its very early, perhaps even original Western context. I'd like to briefly look at some of the implications of this healing process.

⁵⁵ A fruit fly embryo one millimetre in length.

⁵⁶ The unconventional setting allows 'the detection of ...coherently aligned anisotropies in the molecular structures of the tissues' (Ho, 2003, p.165).

⁵⁷ That is, it loses two of the essential four elements of life: water and warmth (fire).

⁵⁸ The molecular order is characterized as dynamic i.e. there has to be energy flow to align and orientate the molecules. This may take the form of a 'global orienting field' of an electrical nature which is very intriguing (Ho, 2003, p.166).

Body as Stone: Exalting the Earth

The importance or necessity of understanding and intelligence is insisted upon... because it is assumed that a species of magical power capable of transforming even brute matter dwells in the human mind (Jung CW 14 P.260).

The alchemical opus traditionally involves working with the things of the earth; metals, minerals, and ores. With the works completion, we end up with something still of the earth; gold, the *lapis* etc, but that also embodies something of highest value. Yet the earth seems the humblest of the four elements, the passive element,⁵⁹ the one so nearly like a tomb, in need of the other more dynamic elements to raise it up and ‘exalt’ it. In the quote above Jung calls matter ‘brute’ i.e. obstinate, intractable. The body too, lying still on the therapists table looks on the face of it to be merely passive, in need of a kick-start to get it going, to support us to meet our own demands. I hope I have revealed instead, an earth-body already active and alive with intelligence and wisdom, already possessing all it needs within it, and that only needs the lightest of touches and approaches to mediate change, healing and fulfilment.

This exploration of the processes of craniosacral therapy has left us with a vision of the body as earth containing all the other elements - water, air and fire - within it, the body as a liquid crystalline matrix (earth water) enlivened by the potency of the breath of life (air fire). In short, the body *is* the stone, namely the ‘arcane substance’ which is paradoxically the transformed and transforming agent in one; tomb, womb and temple. As such it is indeed of the highest value, and we can respond by respecting, trusting, and listening to its messages.⁶⁰

Motion and Stillness: Balancing Active and Passive, Male and Female

Lunar...is the counterpart of Sol, cold, moist, feebly shining or dark, feminine, corporeal, passive. Accordingly her most significant role is that of a partner in the coniunctio (Jung CW 14:154)

Here again we see that the ‘corporeal’ i.e. material and bodily is designated as passive and associated with ‘Lunar’ and the ‘feminine.’ This is reminiscent of the distinction I mentioned in my introduction; that between active as male and passive⁶¹ as female (Brooten, 1996, pp.1-2) Yet this is not the picture that has been presented here, either in the practice of craniosacral therapy or alchemy. In the myth of Osiris, it is he who is passive and the female deities, Isis, Nut, Hathor who rouse him back to life. Hathor especially seems to embody the activating principle per se, to the extent that neither the sun, Re, Osiris or Horus cannot

⁵⁹ See Jung (CW 14: 164)

⁶⁰ We can extend this to the earth we live on as well, which has been sending us some very strong messages recently.

⁶¹ The active passive distinction was primary in the ancient world, more so than male and female (Brooten, 1996, p.2).

move or rise without her.⁶² It is ‘she who infuses the Maker’s forms with life’ (Roberts, 2000, p.22). Jeremy Naydler goes so far as to say that ‘there are no passive goddesses in ancient Egyptian theology’ (Naydler, 1996, 7%). This was one of the unexpected delights of involving myself with Egyptian mythology. Yet the male is also very much present as shown in the role of Horus in his father’s emancipation. My impression has been that in Egyptian cosmic thinking male and female are inextricably entwined in equal status, and that this is reflected in the many images of alchemy where the male and female opposites are presented in equal size, and as if undertaking a mutual process. I think this vision of male and female in mutual collaboration has come down to us in the history of alchemy like a hidden thread.⁶³ For this reason alone, alchemy, with its incredibly rich imagery of psychic transformation deserves to be given another look.

The other part of Jung’s quote relates to Lunar’s role as a partner in the coniunctio. This it is, but in the above context he makes it sound like a minor even paltry role. The role of partner or supporter is not greatly valued in the Western world where we tend to celebrate much more the solar, rational, heroic approach to life and live largely in denial of its downside.⁶⁴ We do not appreciate how hard it is to really listen (Becker, 2001, pp.263-264) and how transforming i.e. effective this can be. My experience with craniosacral therapy transformed my understanding of what it is to be intelligently active. I found that it involved a receptivity - something we don’t normally think of as active at all - and opening to the hidden, non-rational intelligence⁶⁵ in the body.⁶⁶ It also showed me that partnering and co-operating with this intelligence in stillness is paradoxically one of the most profoundly active things one can do. The boundaries between active and passive seem to blur considerably here. I began by highlighting coherent motion in the body as key to health but stillness, which sounds so passive, is the equally important other half of this coniunctio.

I’d like to end with a quote from Roberts relating to the celebration of the night travellers of the Duat in the 6th hour of Osiris’ resurrection⁶⁷ in which reference to the ‘sailing’ Bas (souls) ‘suggests that wind, the breath of life ... has reached these regions’ and that they are now free to ‘move between heaven and earth’ (Roberts, 2000, p.128). It speaks to me both of my own journey from darkness and isolation to a more exciting and fulfilling connection with others, my ongoing hopes, and my feeling that each time I am able to treat either myself or someone else

⁶² See her role in cosmogenesis (Roberts, 2000, p.24) and the solar cycle (Roberts, 2019, p.20).

⁶³ In the same way that Jung describes alchemy as running like an undercurrent to the Christianity that ruled on the surface (Jung, *CW* 12: 23).

⁶⁴ Personal and economic crashes.

⁶⁵ This is in contrast to the 17th century philosopher Spinoza who identified activity with acting under the influence of rational understanding (Spinoza, 1989, pp84-90) and virtue as acting under the guidance of reason (*ibid.*, p.58).

⁶⁶ This now seems to me the wisest way to live in general and accords with the natural world in which we find ourselves e.g. one of changing seasons where retreat is essential to renewal.

⁶⁷ The hour of Osiris’ resurrection .

craniosacrally, it's as if a window, however small is opened and a tiny chink of heavenly liquid light is allowed in to infuse and grace the whole with its presence.

The doors of the sky are opened for me,
The doors of the earth are opened for me,
The bolts of Geb are opened for me...
The mouth of the Pelican is open for me...
And I go forth into the day to the place where I desire to be
(Roberts, 2000, p.128)

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Picture References

Both pictures were accessed from Google pictures.