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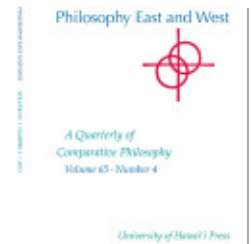
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David M. Odorisio

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# PATAÑJALI'S *YOGA SŪTRAS* AND THE ALCHEMICAL PROCESS OF INDIVIDUATION



**David M. Odorisio**

Lee, MA

dmodorisio@gmail.com

## *Introduction*

This article offers a novel approach to the interpretation of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* (*YS*) through the Jungian lens of Western alchemy. When viewed from this perspective, the *YS* reads not as a final separation of matter and Spirit as traditionally understood, but as a path toward increased wholeness and integration. Jung found in Western alchemy evidence for his own theory of individuation, the psyche's process of Self-becoming. First, I contextualize the *YS* within the broader scholarly conversation on yoga and alchemy. Second, I define Jung's understanding of individuation, specifically in the context of Western alchemy and its processes. Finally, I interpret the prominent stages of the *YS*—*nirodha*, *saṃyoga*, and *kaivalya*—through a Jungian-alechemical lens to demonstrate that Patañjali yoga, far from a dualistic system, works with the undifferentiated matter (*prakṛti*) of the mind (*citta*) in order to transmute it into a more differentiated, individuated, and clarified whole (*kaivalya*).

## *Definition, Scholarship, and Context*

This article views the *YS* through the double lens of a Jungian interpretation of Western alchemical processes. By "alechemical," I refer to spiritual practices and philosophical systems that have developed to work actively with matter, whether the body as in *hatha yoga*, or plants, metals, or other organic substances, in order to transmute the material from a "lower" or base state into a more purified or integrated whole.<sup>1</sup> This definition sets the context for this article, constructed around the work of analytic psychologist Carl G. Jung (1963/1970, 1967, 1968), who interpreted alchemical symbols and processes as metaphors for the unconscious workings of the psyche.

Jung (1968, p. 228) understood the alchemical art as a psychological projection of the alchemist's own unconscious fantasies onto matter. Therefore, to Jung, the terms "alchemy" and "alechemical" refer not only to the historical art of converting lead into gold, but more precisely to the psychological dimensions of the individual conversion of interior "lead" (unconscious aspects, or "shadow") into metaphorical gold (the dawning of consciousness, or integration). Jung termed this process of bringing consciousness to unconscious aspects of the self *individuation* (further outlined below). Jung's psychological interpretation of Western alchemical processes form the core of this article's "alechemical hermeneutic" (Jung 1963/1970, p. 273).

Before examining the *YS* from a Jungian-chemical lens, however, it is important first to place the *YS* in the wider context of the yoga tradition and Indian alchemy.

Placing the *YS* in the context of recent scholarship on yoga, alchemy, and the *YS* assists in determining their relevance or resemblance to later alchemical and tantric traditions. Eliade (1956/1978, 1958), White (1996), and Feuerstein (2008) each demonstrate that the tantric practices of *haṭha yoga*, specifically those of the Natha Siddha School, were developed as an alchemical system. These practices developed as a way to transmute lower or “base” energies of the body into a higher or more purified state that the *Natha* yogis called “the adamantine body”—a perfected body believed to transcend mortality.<sup>2</sup> White (1996) traces the development of such practices as both inner (psycho-spiritual) and outer (metallurgic) alchemical systems within the schools of *haṭha yoga* and *ayurveda*. His work shows the historical interpenetration and complexity of the relationship between these two schools and Indian practices of alchemy.<sup>3</sup>

Although it is widely accepted that the later tantric schools of *haṭha yoga* have alchemical correspondences, any direct relationship between the *Yoga Sūtras* and alchemy remains unclear or unlikely. The *Yoga Sūtras* have traditionally been interpreted as a dualistic system (due to the influence of Sāṃkhya philosophy) and often with a negative emphasis on the “absolute separateness of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*” (Whicher 1995, p. 50).<sup>4</sup> Whicher’s work (1995, 1997, 1998a, 1998b) is important in this regard as he argues against such traditional interpretations in favor of an integrative approach to the *Yoga Sūtras* that can be considered alchemical (and even tantric). He writes:

Patañjali’s *Yoga* can be seen as a responsible engagement, in various ways, of spirit (*puruṣa* = Self, pure consciousness) and matter (*prakṛti* = mind, body, nature) resulting in a highly developed and transformed human nature, an integrated and embodied state of liberated selfhood (*jīvanmukti*). (2005, p. 47)<sup>5</sup>

Through his integrative approach to the *YS*, Whicher’s work forms an important philosophical and epistemological bridge between the *YS* and Jung’s alchemical psychology of individuation.

### *Jung, Individuation, and Western Alchemy*

Unlike the *tantrikas* and Siddha yogis, who used their bodies as alchemical vessels, medieval Western alchemists utilized the laboratory, specifically the crucible or furnace, where raw, dense materials (*prima materia*) were converted to a more purified, refined product called the *lapis*, or philosopher’s stone. Considered by the alchemist to be the ultimate goal, the creation of this stone and its discovery was believed to bring immortality to the one who created it (Goodrick-Clarke 2008, pp. 73–74).

#### *Individuation*

Jung saw his concept of the Self, the archetype of integration and wholeness, as the psychological equivalent of the *lapis*.<sup>6</sup> To Jung, the goal of both the alchemical and

psychological work was the creation of a more differentiated unity (the Self). He termed this journey of Self-becoming *individuation* (Jung 1959/1969, p. 275).<sup>7</sup> Jung defines individuation as the psychological process through which an individual becomes more whole, or integrated, through “bringing into consciousness the unconscious contents of the mind . . . thereby facilitating their differentiation and ultimately their integration” (O’Connor 1985, p. 74). Individuation is primarily a process of differentiation, a “separating out” (the alchemical *separatio*), in order to reintegrate as a more fully differentiated whole (or *coniunctio*).

The foreign symbolism and strange methods of Western alchemy mirrored Jung’s psychological theories, particularly the individuation process. Alchemy gave Jung a language to more fully understand his own encounter with the unconscious forces of the psyche. He writes in his autobiography that the “experiences of the alchemists were, in a sense, my experiences, and their world was my world” (Jung 1963/1989, p. 205). Alchemical stages such as *solutio*, *nigredo*, *separatio*, and *coniunctio* became keys to unlocking and understanding the often strange and mysterious signs, symbols, and dreams of the psyche. Alchemical symbolism became a signpost to mark the path toward integration and wholeness.<sup>8</sup>

### *The Alchemical Process*

The Western alchemical processes that fascinated Jung occurred in neither a linear nor a codified fashion. Typically, the process began with the acquisition of a base, or crude substance, the *prima materia*.<sup>9</sup> This mysterious substance, “matter before it was formed” (Raff 2000, p. xxi), first needed to be reduced to an undifferentiated state in order that its inner essence could be extracted. In other words, an initial purification of the original material needed to happen. This purification occurred through a variety of alchemical operations involving multiple processes of “separation and re-unification, *solve et coagula*” (ibid.).

The *nigredo*, or “blackening,” stage was performed multiple times throughout the process and describes the destruction or reduction of the material to its original form. *Solutio* liquefied the material or elements, and described the process of turning a solid to liquid and, along with the *nigredo*, was seen as a metaphorical “death” of the material. *Separatio* was “the means of rending apart the components of the *prima materia*,” while the *coniunctio* “rejoined them” (Raff 2000, p. xxiii). *Calcinatio* included “the process of burning a substance and reducing it to ash” (p. xxi), while *sublimatio* described the conversion of the material into vapor. *Coagulatio* turned a liquid back into a solid form.<sup>10</sup>

Color was also particularly important throughout the alchemical process, which alchemists associated with changes or transformations of matter (Raff 2000, p. xxi). Three primary colors were associated with three different stages: *nigredo*, *albedo*, and *rubedo*. The *nigredo* phase, associated with the color black, corresponded with the death or decay of the material. White represented the *albedo* stage, a purified state, while red signified the *rubedo*, the phase when the blood, or life, was brought back into the material.<sup>11</sup> Raff concludes, “Change in color therefore symbolized a transmutation of the substance and its movement from one level of being to another” (p. xxiv).

## *Alchemical Hermeneutics*<sup>12</sup>

Practically, Jung (1954/1966, 1968) applied the processes and transformational states of Western alchemy to the analytic hour in order to understand more deeply his patients' unconscious dreams, fantasies, and behaviors. Theoretically, Jung (1942/1954, 1963/1970) utilized alchemical stages as a lens to interpret religious and spiritual texts. The use of an "alchemical hermeneutic" (Jung 1963/1970, p. 273) helped Jung to gather psychological evidence for his individuation theory through a cross-cultural study of religious phenomena. The alchemical hermeneutic provided evidence that his theory of individuation was not solely a modern phenomenon, but had roots in the unconscious soil of humanity's myth, ritual, and spiritual practices throughout time (see Neumann 1954). The YS, when viewed through an alchemical lens, further support this claim.

### *Alchemy and the Yoga Sūtras*

When interpreted through an alchemical hermeneutic the YS read not as a final separation of matter and Spirit, but as an integrative model of psychological wholeness, or individuation. In Patañjali yoga, emotion, sensation, visualization, and cognition are systemically dissolved (*solutio*), separated out (*separatio*), and finally reintegrated (*coniunctio*) into a more aligned, synthesized, or individuated whole. Through a reinterpretation of the YS using the general categories of Western alchemy, Patañjali yoga emerges as a path of integration and individuated wholeness.

### *Nirodha and Nigredo*

In the *Yoga Sūtras* as with alchemy, the materials that mark the beginning stages are found again, in the end, transmuted. Patañjali defines the goal of yoga at the outset of the YS: *yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ* ("Yoga is the stilling of the changing states of the mind" [I.2]<sup>13</sup>). It is the same material, *citta*, transformed from its initial "fluctuating" (*vṛtti*) states through the process of *nirodha* (cessation), found purified at the end of the YS as *citi-śaktir* (YS IV.34). *Citta* describes "the various components of the 'inner world'—of the psyche," and is "not distinguishable from its component factors . . . *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra*, and *manas*" (Whicher 1998b, p. 93). Whicher writes: "Patañjali, by his concept of *citta*, emphasizes the homogeneity or integral psychological constitution of the human personality as well as the processes . . . of empirical consciousness" (p. 93).

*Vṛttis* refer to the "turning," "revolutions," or "rolling" of the mind (Whicher 1998b, p. 109). As Whicher writes, "The functioning of the mind takes place through various modifications (*vṛttis*) that give form to our perceptions, thoughts, emotions and so forth" (ibid.). These *vṛttis* are clouded, however, by the conditionings of the mind, or "impressions," called *saṃskāras*. Caused by the individual's personal and inherited *karma* these *saṃskāras* create *vṛttis*, which lead to the creation of the *kleśas*, or "erroneous cognitions" (p. 111). In alchemical terminology, a "melting down" (*calcinatio*) or "dissolution" (*solutio*) needs to occur, in order to "burn" the *saṃskāras*

and reduce the *vṛttis* back to their primal or primordial state in *prakṛti* (the alchemical *nigredo*).<sup>14</sup> This is the process that the *YS* call *nirodha*.

Through an alchemical lens, *nirodha* initiates the *nigredo*, the reduction of a substance to its primal condition (Raff 2000, p. xxi).<sup>15</sup> According to Whicher it is through the process of *nirodha* that the fluctuations (*vṛttis*) of the “mind stuff” are “dissolved” (*laya*) back into the “substratum” of the mind (*citta*) (Whicher 1998b, p. 157). It is in this “substratum” that “all modifications arise, all the cognitive, affective, and emotive processes take place” (ibid.). This “substratum” (*dharmī*—*YS* III.14<sup>16</sup>) is important as it represents the *prima materia* of the mind, the place of unconscious origin from which the *saṃskāras* initially arise, and therefore need to return to, in order to heal. A “melting down” (*calcinatio*) of unconscious complexes (*saṃskāras*) occurs that may result in a “blackening” (*nigredo*) of ego consciousness (*asmitā*). It is only then that the mind “abides in its own true nature” (*svaṛūpe* ‘*vasthānam*—*YS* I.3). *Nirodha*, “cessation,” is the process through which this begins, but how does the process actually occur? This leads to the actual practices (*abhyāsa*) of yoga.

It is through the practices of yoga that the process of reducing (*calcinatio*) the material of the mind (*citta*) to its substrate form occurs. Patañjali calls this process *nirodha*, equated here to the *nigredo* (“blackening” of ego consciousness [*asmitā*]), and describes three distinct paths that lead to it. The first is through the practice of *vairāgya* (“dispassion”—*YS* I.12, 15). It is through *vairāgya* that, “[t]he *vṛtti* states of mind are stilled” (Bryant 2009, p. 47). *Vairāgya* is defined (*YS* I.15) as “the controlled consciousness of one who is without craving for sense objects” (Bryant 2009, p. 52). It is the development of a form of “witness consciousness” (*anupaśyah*—*YS* II.20), or objective inner state, from which *viveka* or discrimination can arise (*YS* II.26). It is this practice of dispassionate awareness, or witness consciousness, combined with the discriminatory capacity of the mind, that Patañjali defines as “the means to liberation” (*YS* II.26; Bryant 2009, p. 243). From a place of objective discernment the yogi can begin the practice of watching the thought-waves (*citta-vṛttis*) arise and pass without acting on them, thereby eliminating their power and beginning the process of dismantling the illusions or obstacles of the mind (*kleśas*).

Patañjali also mentions the path of chanting *mantras*, specifically the syllable *OM* (I.27) as a means of liberating mental constraints. It is from chanting *OM* that “the realization of the inner consciousness and freedom from all disturbances” arises (*YS* I.29; Bryant 2009, p. 117). These disturbances are described as “distractions” (*YS* I.30) and are accompanied by “suffering” (*duḥkha*) and “dejection” (*daurmanasya*) (*YS* I.31). Through focusing the mind on one object (the syllable *OM*) these disturbances are eliminated (*YS* I.32).

However, it is to the eight-limbed path (‘*ṣṭāu aṅgāni*—*YS* II.29) of yoga that Patañjali devotes the most attention, and which has the most alchemical relevance. It is through these practices, specifically *yama* (restraints), *niyama* (observances), *āsana* (physical practice), *prāṇāyāma* (breath practices), and *pratyāhāra* (inward attention) that the *nigredo* of *nirodha* occurs. It is through the more “willful practices” of the earlier stages of the eight-limbed path that the later practices, *dhāraṇā*

(concentration), *dhyāna* (meditation), and *samādhi* (absorption), which are more “surrender practices,” can arise.<sup>17</sup> These earlier or foundation-laying practices create a container (the alchemical furnace or crucible) that is strong enough to withstand the fire, or heat (*tapah*), of the yogi’s discipline or spiritual practice (*sādhana*). *Tapah*, one of the *niyama* practices, is that by which the yogi alchemically “heats up” the body-mind to reduce (*calcinatio*) the *citta-vṛttis* to their latent state in the primordial mind—the deep unconscious from which all *karma*, *saṃskāras* (complexes), and *kleśas* (shadow elements) arise. This is the crucible of yoga practice and is how *nirodha* and the dissolution of the *citta-vṛttis* “works.”<sup>18</sup>

It is through the deep *sādhana* of yoga (whether through practice of *yama* and *niyama* or *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma*) that the yogi deliberately intensifies (*tapah*) inner sensation or emotion to disrupt the psychic system and the ego’s (*asmitā/ahankāra*) illusory, yet maniacal, control over the Self. The yogi intentionally creates a state of inner chaos or confusion (the “chaos” of entering the *prima materia*—see Raff 2000, p. xxi<sup>19</sup>) that eventually leads to the “overthrow” or replacement of ego-sovereignty by the Self (*puruṣa*). As Yoganand Michael Carroll writes:

[A]ncient yogis grasped the intrinsic relationship between ahankara [*sic*] and energy and tried purposefully to raise the energy [*tapah*] through their practices, deliberately creating a disturbance. What they discovered was that for every increase in energy there was a correspondingly different perception. *Thus when we raise the energy, we shift our perception of the self.* (Carroll 2004, p. 221; italics added)

He continues: “with profound shifts in energy, ahankara [*sic*] dissolves [*olutio*], and for brief moments we access a place of transcendence, oneness, and peace. Every time we return [*coagulatio*] from such states, we reassemble or reintegrate [*coniunctio*] at a different level” (ibid.). Carroll demonstrates that *tapah* is a form of *calcinatio*, a process of purifying the “mind-stuff” (*citta*) that leads to a more integrated union. Before reintegration (*coniunctio*) can occur, however, a further separating out (*separatio*) must first take place. In the *YS* this happens through the release of the bind of *saṃyoga*.

#### Samyoga and Separatio

Patañjali defines *saṃyoga* (*YS* II.17) as the “conjunction,” or enmeshment, of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, matter and Spirit.<sup>20</sup> Psychologically this looks like the beginning stages of individuation (cf. O’Connor 1985, p. 73), where one begins to take ownership for one’s projections and withdraw them from their enmeshment with external phenomena. Alchemically, this stage of the work demands the sharp knife of *separatio*, as “conjoined” materials are separated out, measured, and examined for what they are; only then, once each part is known in full, can a conscious reintegration (*coniunctio*) occur.

This process is mirrored in the *YS* through the problem of *saṃyoga*, “the conjunction [*saṃyogah*] between the seer and that which is seen,” described as a “cause [of suffering] to be avoided” (Bryant 2009, p. 213). In other words, *puruṣa* (the

seer) is enmeshed with *prakṛti* (the seen). More than “the seen,” however, *prakṛti* additionally constitutes all that is *not seen*: the unconscious substrate of the mind, its projections, and shadow elements (Coward 1985). The unraveling of *saṁyoga* means a *separatio* of unconscious forces in order that the clarity of consciousness may shine through.

Any confusion or misidentification of *puruṣa* with the psychic elements of *prakṛti* results in *saṁyoga*. Whicher describes the importance of *saṁyoga* in the YS as the “starting point of the search for liberation” (1998b, p. 130). Because the nature of suffering is linked to identification within the world of *prakṛti*, it is imperative that the dissolution (*olutio*) of *saṁyoga* occurs. This enables the practitioner to experience the authentic nature of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* through the process of “overcoming attachment to [and identification with] the modifications of the mind” (ibid.).

Patañjali describes overcoming the obstacle of *saṁyoga* (YS II.23) as “the means of understanding the real nature of the powers of the possessed [*prakṛti*] and of the possessor [*puruṣa*]” (Bryant 2009, p. 229). In the “misidentified state,” this relationship is reversed, where the person misidentifies *prakṛti* as *puruṣa* or vice versa. In a Jungian context, this can be interpreted as a lack of conscious awareness of—and resulting enslavement to—unconscious projections, including underlying archetypes and their associated complexes. It is through the projection of unconscious “shadow” material that the individual “enmeshes” with, or becomes attached or addicted to, external realities, resulting in the state of *saṁyoga*. It is a primary task of the individuation process that a person begins to examine and take ownership of projections while simultaneously dis-identifying with them (*separatio*) in order that “an authentic and fruitful coherence of self-identity” can emerge (Whicher 1998b, p. 291).

YS II.24 supports such a psychological interpretation: “The cause of the conjunction [*saṁyoga*] is ignorance [*avidyā*]” (Bryant 2009, p. 232). As highlighted above, both *vairāgya* (dispassion) and *viveka* (discrimination) form two foundations of yoga practice (*abhyāsa*). It is “undeviating” (*aviplavā*) discrimination (*viveka*) that serves as “the means to liberation” (YS II.26). In other words, it is the increase of consciousness through the practice of *vairāgya* and *viveka* that overcomes the unconscious state of *avidyā*, and subsequently *saṁyoga*. As YS II.25 states, “By the removal of ignorance [i.e., bringing consciousness to unconscious contents], [the] conjunction [*saṁyoga*] is removed. This is the absolute freedom [*kaivalya*] of the seer” (Bryant 2009, p. 234).

Through the *separatio* of *viveka* the bind of *saṁyoga* is removed. The seer is no longer enmeshed in that which is seen. A certain objectivity and clarity has been established between the realms of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. Traditional interpretations of the YS end here with a final *separatio* in *kaivalya*. From this perspective *kaivalya* (“absolute freedom”) is understood as the ultimate separation between matter and Spirit (the “aloneness” of *puruṣa*). An alchemical interpretation, however, continues the psycho-spiritual work through interpreting *kaivalya* as a process of reintegration. *Kaivalya* as *coniunctio* is the final stage of Patañjali’s alchemical yoga.



### Kaivalya and Coniunctio

*Kaivalya*, “absolute freedom,” or “aloneness,” interpreted alchemically represents the reintegration of the *coniunctio*. This stage of the alchemical process describes the transcendent reunion or reintegration of Spirit-in-matter, previously separated out for purification and now re-formed as a differentiated unity. There are discrepancies between *kaivalya* as *coniunctio* and the traditional understanding of *kaivalya* as a final separation of matter and Spirit that necessitate further explication of the *coniunctio* itself. Before highlighting this process, *kaivalya* first requires a more thorough understanding of its role and development in the YS.

*Kaivalya* first appears in YS II.25 (cited above), where it is experienced as “absolute freedom” resulting from the dissolution of *saṃyoga*. *Kaivalya* next appears in YS III.50 within the section on mystic powers (*siddhis*). Patañjali tells the reader that *kaivalya*, “the supreme liberation,” occurs through detachment (*vairāgyāt*) from the *siddhis* of omniscience and omnipotence as well as through “the destruction of the seeds of all faults” (*doṣa-bīja-kṣaye*) (Bryant 2009, p. 392). Alchemically, this passage can be interpreted as a summary of the psychological stages thus far. Through the *calcinatio*, the heat of *tapaḥ*, and the subsequent “blackening” of the *nigredo*, the seeds (*bīja*) of all faults (*doṣa*) are destroyed (*kṣaye*). Then, through the *separatio* of *vairāgya* (detachment) *kaivalya* is attained.

The clarity of consciousness that results from YS III.50 is further developed in III.55. Patañjali writes: “When the purity of the intellect is equal to that of the *puruṣa*, *kaivalya* liberation ensues” (Bryant 2009, p. 403). First, the distinction between the *puruṣa* and the intellect needs to be made (YS III.49).<sup>21</sup> Second, there needs to be a *separatio* (*vairāgya*) from the powers (*siddhis*) that arise (YS III.50). In YS III.55 the intellect, now entirely “*sattvified*,” can begin to “reflect *puruṣa* perfectly” (Bryant 2009, p. 403). There is still a distinction between *puruṣa* and intellect; however, intellect has become “equal” to *puruṣa* as a “perfect reflection of *puruṣa*” (ibid.). The mind (*buddhi*), having undergone the alchemical purification process, now reflects its true nature (*puruṣa*) “perfectly.” The reunion (*coniunctio*) of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* through *kaivalya* is reached.

By the time the yogi reaches the states of consciousness described in the final *sūtras* of the *kaivalya pāda*, the mind (*cittam*) “inclined toward discrimination (*viveka*) gravitates toward ultimate liberation (*kaivalya-prāgbhāram*)” (YS IV.26). There is an energy or magnetism drawing the yogi toward the Self.<sup>22</sup> In YS IV.28 and IV.30 a further purification (*calcinatio*) removes any remaining *saṃskāras*, *kleśas*, and *karma* (as a result of the *dharma-megha* state [YS IV.29]) as well as the “cessation of the ongoing permutations of the *guṇas*” (YS IV.32). The mind is now prepared for the final stage of *kaivalya*, “ultimate liberation” (Bryant 2009, p. 457) and alchemical reunion.

According to Patañjali (YS IV.34), *kaivalya* occurs when “the *guṇas*, devoid of any purpose for the *puruṣa*, return to their original [latent] state; in other words, when the power of consciousness is situated in its own essential nature” (Bryant 2009, p. 457). There are two implicit definitions of *kaivalya*. In the first, the *guṇas* return to their original state (*pratiprasavaḥ*).<sup>23</sup> This can be considered a further purification through the *nigredo* (blackening), or *calcinatio*, the reduction of the material to ash.

In the second definition of *kaivalya*, the power of consciousness (*citi-śaktir*) is “situated in its own essential nature” (*svarūpa-pratiṣṭhā*). I interpret this as the final union (*coniunctio*), marking the creation of the *lapis*, the philosopher’s stone, alchemical goal and symbol of psychological individuation.

In order to complete the alchemical interpretation of *kaivalya* as *coniunctio*, the later requires further explanation. As outlined previously, there are three primary colors associated with the alchemical process: black (*nigredo*), white (*albedo*), and red (*rubedo*). The first two stages are accompanied by a “death,” which reduces (*calcinatio*) the material to ash in order to re-form it into a more integrated union. The red stage (*rubedo*) marks the final state where the *lapis*, or philosopher’s stone, emerges.

Interpreted psychologically these three stages relate to different levels of individuation. As Raff states, “Each level of union . . . may be understood as the crystallization of a new center of the psyche [the Self]. . . . [T]he third [*rubedo*] . . . unites the self already created [purified, refined *citta*] with a center [*purusa*] that transcends the human psyche” (2000, p. xxv). This process forms the connection between the final (*rubedo*) stage of *coniunctio* and *kaivalya*. It is a differentiated unity where *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, although appearing separate (the “aloneness” of *puruṣa*), function as a re-defined whole where *puruṣa* (the Self) is no longer confused, misidentified with, or enslaved by *prakṛti* (“un-evolved” *prakṛti*: the *citta-vṛttis*, *kleśas*, negative *saṃskāras*, etc.). This is purified or refined *prakṛti* in an evolved and integrated relationship with *puruṣa*, the Self.<sup>24</sup>

At this point the alchemical yoga of Patañjali reaches a final integrated conclusion. In the *kaivalya* state *prakṛti* has become “so integrated in the yogin’s consciousness that it has become ‘one’ with the yogin” (Whicher 1998b, p. 282). Through the alchemical process of purification *prakṛti* has been refined, reintegrated, and aligned with *puruṣa* in an evolved relationship of differentiated union. Beginning with the *nigredo* of *nirodha*, and overcoming *saṃyoga* through *separatio*, the practitioner of Patañjali yoga reaches the *coniunctio* in *kaivalya*. Integrated wholeness has been born in the soul, forged through the depth practices of the *Yoga Sūtras*.

### Conclusion

When viewed through an alchemical lens, the YS read not as a final separation of matter and Spirit, but as a process of integration and differentiated wholeness. From an alchemical perspective, the YS describe the mind’s descent into the chaos of primordial matter (*prima materia*) in order to be re-formed in alignment with Spirit (*coniunctio*). Through the yogic-alchemical path of *nirodha* (*nigredo*), *saṃyoga* (*separatio*), and *kaivalya* (*coniunctio*) the undifferentiated matter of the unconscious mind is transformed into a clarified, individuated, and integrated whole. An alchemical hermeneutic supports Whicher’s (1995, 1998a, 1998b) thesis that Patañjali yoga is not a turn away from matter, but a purification of mind through the *tapaḥ* of spiritual practice in order first to liberate and then to reintegrate matter and Spirit.

An alchemical reading of the YS amplifies the psychological process that Jung termed *individuation*. Through the formation of a more conscious relationship with

unconscious forces, the psyche is yoked (*yuj*), harmonized, and healed. Wholeness emerges in the *kaivalya* state, where, similar to the philosopher's stone, a psycho-spiritual totality is forged through the heat (*tapah*) of deep and integral yoga practice. Patañjali yoga, with the goal "to abolish multiplicity and fragmentation, to reintegrate, to unify, to make whole" (Eliade 1958, p. 97), when interpreted through a Jungian-alchemical lens, offers a mature path for psycho-spiritual growth and awakening to "the very life of the cosmos" (ibid.) that pulsates from within.

## Notes

- 1 – See Eliade 1956/1978 for a historical and cross-cultural study of the various spiritual and religious ideologies that have emerged from alchemical practices.
- 2 – The "adamantine body" can also be inferred in *YS* III.46, *kāya-sampat* ("the perfection of the body"), which is described as *samghananatvāni* or "being of solid nature" (Bryant 2009, p. 385).
- 3 – In addition to the North Indian (Bengali) Siddha Yoga tradition, the rich body of material from the Kashmir Shaivist schools can also be interpreted as an alchemical system of its own (e.g., the integration and interpenetration of Śiva-Śakti, as well as tantric practices of ritual sex [*maithuna*]). See Eliade 1958 for the *coincidenta oppositorum* (the "coincidence of opposites") in tantrism (pp. 269–270) as well as the practice of *maithuna* (pp. 259–267).
- 4 – Whicher (1995, p. 50) cites Eliade 1958, Feuerstein 1979, and Larson 1987, as well as other contemporary scholars who support this position, which his own work challenges. Aranya 1984 can also be included in this list.
- 5 – Not all scholars have agreed with Whicher's presentation of the *Yoga Sūtras*. Larson (1999) argues against Whicher's definition and translation of yoga (*YS* I.2), while Olivelle (2001, p. 679) accuses Whicher of being "unhistorical and anachronistic." See Whicher 1999 for a direct response to Larson's review of his work.
- 6 – "[T]he lapis . . . is a half physical, half metaphysical product, a psychological symbol expressing something created by [a person] and yet supra-ordinate to [that person]. This paradox can only be something like the symbol of the *self*, which likewise can be brought forth, i.e., made conscious, by human effort but is at the same time by definition a pre-existent totality that includes the conscious and unconscious" (Jung 1963/1970, p. 454).
- 7 – *Selbst-werdung* in German (Maillard 2005, p. 650).
- 8 – It is important to note that Jung's role in the history of alchemy is not without contemporary critique from both spiritualist/perennialist and historical-critical perspectives. For a spiritualist critique, see Burckhardt 1971, pp. 8–9, 98–100. For a historical critique, see Goodrick-Clarke 2008, pp. 245–247, and Mail-

lard 2005, p. 652. Grossinger (1979, pp. 281–284) offers a balanced review. For a critique of the misuse and misinterpretation of Jung’s esoteric thought in contemporary popular circles, see Hammer 2005, pp. 653–655.

- 9 – Jung defines the *prima materia* psychologically as “the unknown substance that carries the projection of the autonomous psychic content” (1968, p. 317)—in other words, an alchemist’s shadow or complex.
- 10 – See Jung 1968, pp. 228–232, for Jung’s summary of these stages. Edinger 1985 provides an in-depth psychoanalytic treatment of each stage of the alchemical process.
- 11 – There is an interesting correlation here between these three stages and the *guṇas* of Samkhya, which are associated with the identical colors: *lohita-śukla-kṛṣṇām* (red, white, and black, respectively). Red (the alchemical *rubedo*) is associated with *rajas*, white (*albedo*) with *sattva*, and black (*nigredo*) with *tamas* (cf. Radhakrishnan 2010, p. 732). Burckhardt (1971, pp. 182–183) further compares the alchemical stages and the interplay of the *guṇas*. Coudert (1980, p. 42) connects the color sequence to ancient Greek dyeing techniques.
- 12 – In using the term *alchemical hermeneutics* I refer to the methodology employed by Jung (1963/1970) as a theoretical model for interpretive, or hermeneutic inquiry. Romanyshyn (2005) has developed a *qualitative* depth-psychological method of inquiry by the same name, which differs greatly from Jung’s original use of the term/method.
- 13 – All YS translations are from Bryant 2009 unless otherwise noted.
- 14 – See also YS II.10, “These *kleśas* are subtle; they are destroyed when [the mind] dissolves back into its original matrix (*pratiprasava*)” (Bryant 2009, p. 192).
- 15 – Eliade supports this interpretation: “In alchemical terms, to ‘fix’ or to ‘kill’ mercury is tantamount to attaining to the *citta-vrttinirodha* . . . which is the ultimate aim of yoga” (1956/1978, p. 133).
- 16 – “The substratum is that which underpins past, present, and future” (*śāntoditāvyapadeśya-dharmānupātī dharmī*).
- 17 – The distinction between willful and surrender practices (Desai 1985) is made in the Kripalu Yoga tradition, a contemporary school of yoga founded by Amrit Desai and based on the teachings of Swami Kripalvanandaji (1913–1981). See Cornell 1998 for an overview of modern day Kripalu Yoga through a Jungian lens.
- 18 – Hillman writes, “Alchemy is a profession of . . . those at the edge. Those who live from their own fires, sweating it out, self-sustaining their own temperatures. . . . *Tapas*: the ardor of inner heat. In India the sage sits in the Himalayan snow and with his own body heat melts a place to be, contained by his own containment” (2010, p. 21).

- 19 – Washburn (1995) describes in depth the process of the “mental ego” coming into contact with the “dynamic ground.”
- 20 – The mutual redemption of spirit and matter was an important theme in Western alchemy as well (see Jung 1968, pp. 306–316).
- 21 – Intellect is here referred to as “*sattvified*” *buddhi* (Bryant 2009, p. 389).
- 22 – This correlation between *puruṣa* and the Jungian Self is assumed at the functional (i.e., psychological) level, not the ontological or semantic.
- 23 – This is also how the *kleśas* are destroyed (YS II.10): *pratiprasava-heyāḥ*.
- 24 – It is important to highlight the transcendent or “transpersonal” nature of this *coniunctio* or reintegration. Both Whicher’s and my own interpretation disagree with the conclusion of Jordens (1985), who adheres to a traditional reading of Classical Yoga: “Viewed from the point of view of yoga doctrine, the transcendence and reintegration Jung describes takes place within *prakṛti*: it is nothing more than the reconciliation of forces that are essentially *prakṛitic*” (p. 159). I believe Jordens underestimates the transpersonal nature of Jung’s work and the process of individuation.

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