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Introduction to the Art of Manifestation

A NUMBER OF YEARS ago, in a dream, I found myself on a long search with two elders, one on each side of me. We had been seeking the “crown jewels” and had entered a deep cavern where I discovered a large pool filled with clear golden ghee—the clarified butter used for ritual offerings in classical India. I knelt down and peered into the pool, and there I saw the jewels, shimmering under the surface. I reached down with trembling excitement, when suddenly the elders on each side simultaneously ordered me to stop. They informed me that these were not the jewels we needed and that I had to return to my own land and engage in contemplative prayer.

This “big dream,” as C.G. Jung might have labeled it, became a call to the Alchemy of Abundance, directing me—after years of travel and study in Europe, India, and the Middle East, after initiations and long terms of practice in various yogic and

healing traditions, and after years of intellectual pursuits in the philosophy and aesthetics of religion—to return home. “Home,” not just in the sense of returning to the roots of Western tradition (after all, the three of us were enacting the search of the Magi for the Christ), but a return to the heart of prayer and to the soil, the *humus* (from where the word “humility” comes from), to my world of the Hudson Valley and to a spiritual path that would be non-different from everyday life.

Yet, when we turn toward home, we hold all the energies of all the places we have been. We weave them back into the tapestry of our experience and they enrich our communities and ourselves in a new way. This program, then, is the fruit of years of work and an ever-deepening intuition that our unique place in time demands a unique vision: one that integrates the great insights and traditions from all times and places with the here and now. To put it simply, no major world religion was ever founded in or upon a democracy, and the rise of the individual and the great American experiment of the pursuit of happiness—predicated upon the freedom of conscience—demands that each of us walk the earth in our own way. This is true abundance: to cower before no one and no thing, to honor the life we have been given, and to dare to open to our fullness. At the same time, we are asked to walk together, to open to one another with our compassion, and to perceive and create forms of connection that keep us related without sacrificing the freedom we have gained at such great cost.

If abundance honors the dignity, goodness, and value of the individual, then alchemy—as one of the great disciplines at the root of Western culture—honors the collective. I use “alchemy” here, not in the sense of some arcane esoteric lore, but in the way that Jung, Hillman, and other depth psychologists have construed it: that the journey of purifying base metal into gold is an inner one, organically ordered by the wisdom of the psyche through its unfolding in the life of the individual.

I am using “alchemy” then to denote an inherent and authentic process of self-realization present in our cultural milieu, one that need not be imposed upon a person, but rather one that unfolds through the interaction of inner imagery and outer experience, the fruit of which is pure living wisdom, the “philosopher’s stone.” The hermetic, alchemical teachings, in fact, offer us the richest body of spiritual practice to have been developed in the West, and we owe our modern interest in depth psychology and astrology to them. Moreover, they are our own equivalent to the *Tantric* traditions of the East as the Tibetan Buddhist teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche once remarked, calling Alchemy “the *Tantra* of the West.” Indeed, the practice of Abundance may itself be a part of the evolution of our own Tantric tradition: one that does not get caught up in organizations but that honors the soil upon which we stand, the unique situation of every person, and the mysterious fusion of opposites—masculine and feminine, compassion and wisdom—as the core of the “Great Work.”

The modern Alchemist may not be holed up in a laboratory, but he or she understands that the true field of experimentation, the *alembic*, or vessel, where the work is done is within the self, and that the “self” is not some abstract entity above and beyond the world, but is squarely within the world—within everything and everyone. Enlightenment, then, is not conceived of as an “ultimate state” but as the ongoing reality of this moment: the intersection of time and timeless that obliterates neither, but opens to a rich panoramic vista of teeming life as divinity itself: the ongoing experience of abundance.

This program is about realizing this abundance in our lives. It is about creating pathways to participate fully and consciously in the “Great Work” of alchemical transformation. Through the guided explorations and working with the zodiacal mandala, you will witness the ongoing fusion of dreams and archetypes with the most ordinary and practical of situations. You will

understand and experience your own unique ability to generate well-being in every aspect of your life and to share it with others.

The core practice here, akin to the alchemical distillation of gold, is known as “manifestation,” bringing the deepest, purist expression of your life into visible form. As with Tantra, there is an understanding that all that is necessary to realize your full potential is already present. You are simply asked to deal consciously with everything that is happening in your life as your practice of abundance, wholeheartedly and nonjudgmentally. As you will see in this program, by learning to trust the flow of creativity that naturally moves through your life, you will forge profound connections with everything and everyone in your world; you will come home to the humus, the soil, of your own daily life, and discover a level of abundance that has always been and ever-will sustain you.

Very often, when people hear about “abundance” and “manifestation,” they think about getting what they want, and what they want is magic and miracles. One challenge in the *Alchemy of Abundance* is to accept and work with the very earthy reality of particular situations. Patience, perseverance, and persistence are the key qualities that can help move you from dreaming into action. When things are cramped and difficult, when it looks like you cannot make it through, the techniques in the *Alchemy of Abundance* can inspire you to focus and move forward. The proper respect for your current reality will lead you to accept situations and see them through to completion. When you have fully grounded yourself in reality, mastered the techniques and explorations included in this program, and learned how underlying forces bring things about, you will then be able to experience and express what to others will seem like magic and miracles.

In this program, you will become familiar with powerful processes that can be mastered, and with subtle energies that can be harnessed, to achieve what you most want in your life; this is the “alchemy” of it. These forces are real,

and their power is palpable. To be a contemporary alchemist is to work clearly, honorably, and consciously with them, leaving no stone unturned. The ongoing use of the guided meditations on the CD included in this program will allow you to perceive your current situation in its contemplative depth and beauty. The visualizations are designed to take you deeper into your own being, allowing you to uncover and examine the vast array of profound forces operating in your life as you begin to hear the music of the spheres in the walk-a-day world.

In the spirit of the great hermetic and alchemical traditions, we will be working with a mandala that includes twelve realms, patterned after the signs and houses of the zodiac, which are the backbone of the hermetic structure and language. Each of these realms is a doorway through which you can explore specific areas of your life, to clarify and empower what you want to bring into being. The process of working with this meditational model is to learn to move into each of the mandala's realms effortlessly and repeatedly and to then return to your center, incorporating the visions and information you have received. This interweaving will allow you to integrate seemingly separate perceptions and experiences into a vision of your life in which everything is seen as part of a greater whole. It is this interweaving process of exterior and interior, self and other, immediate and universal, that is "Tantric" (from the verb *-tan*, "to weave") and that will reveal the integral tapestry created by the various facets of your experience allowing you to bring it all back home.

The real work of manifestation is to weave these strands of your life into a "Temple of Beauty" that can sustain you beyond ego-based narratives of dominance and survival and beyond romantic fantasies of lack and longing. It is about learning to trust the practice of opening yourself, heart-first, to all of existence and letting your experience of who you are, what you are doing, and where you are going expand into its natural flowering.

By creating your own Mandala of Manifestation, you will literally transform your fate, bringing disparate aspects of your life experience into relationship and, hence, into a more controlled focus. Instead of being unconsciously caught in the patterns of your life, you will become a conscious and active participant in the process of manifestation that is available to you in every moment. You will see classical mythology unfolding in your daily life as you discover your own artistry, building your mandala as a daily practice. You will find yourself more deeply engaged with the natural elements, the cycles of the seasons, and with others around you as you realize what riches exist and have always existed right here, in your day-to-day life, which is the realm of abundance.

CHAPTER
ONE

What Is Abundance?

BEFORE WE BEGIN to discuss abundance, let us be clear about what it is not. Abundance is not the result of a Faustian pact to achieve personal greatness. Such quests are, in fact, often motivated by feelings of inadequacy. Abundance is also not about running around and trying to score as many points as possible before the game ends. It is not a race to see how much you can get done in a week, or in an ambitious five-year plan. Abundance is not about the accumulation of goods; nor is it the unrealistic renunciation of material comforts. Neither is abundance about finding a way to remain merely comfortable—a safe way to stay lukewarm.

In essence, true abundance is freedom. It is fundamental well-being, a fulfillment that is not dependent on exterior conditions. Abundance is learning to trust life. It is reality lived fully—being conscious, present, and whole.

Therefore, the *quality of your attention* is the genuine measure of abundance, and it is your greatest capital asset in any situation.

What we come to understand and affirm is that even through the most difficult circumstances of life, abundant beauty and richness may be found. It is our faith in the goodness and wisdom of things that allows us to work our way through life's darkest moments. In this way, abundance is also faith in the basic goodness of life. It is saying "yes" to all that we can know of life—including the suffering that surrounds us. It is also saying "yes" to that which we do not know, to open and accept the unknown with grace. A sense of abundance gives us the freedom to participate fully in our lives by doing what we can to assist others. If we do not ourselves feel rich, how can we give to others what has been given to us? In this way, abundance becomes the rainbow shining through the storm, the promise of our divine destiny.

The practices included in the *Alchemy of Abundance* will help you through challenging times by giving you concrete tools to deepen your faith, your patience, your generosity, and your power to realize that what you desire in your life is the abundance of beauty and blessedness that always abounds in the present moment.

In Indian tantra, such practice is known as *sadbhava*, a term that indicates the pursuit and practice of virtue and its power. The word comes from the Sanskrit verbal root *-sid*, which means to straighten, to get straight, to get clear, and to bring things into alignment. The Tantric yoga of manifestation is thus a constant "straightening"—aligning our will with the will of the universe and our desires with the reality of the moment. What is unique to the alchemical approach of manifestation is that this "straightening" is not only moral but aesthetic as well. One without the other would certainly be limited. If we solely try to be good and moral, we often become dry and lifeless, and if we only focus on beauty or on what

is emotionally powerful, we risk becoming sentimental or shallow. The alchemical path of manifestation involves the integration of our moral fiber and ethics along with our aesthetic and magical sensibility.

Before we can begin to explore the Alchemy of Abundance, we must answer some fundamental questions. First, we must ask, “Why do anything? Why bother even getting up in the morning?” Or as my son used to say to me when I would ask him to make his bed, “Why should I make my bed if it’s just going to get unmade again?” In short, we are asked to confront the issue of desire, its reality, its fulfillment, and its frustrations in the face of an impermanent world.

In the Western alchemical tradition, the instinctual level of desire is envisioned in terms of the *Uroboros*, the great serpent endlessly devouring its own tail. Here, the *Uroboros* is a symbol of the incessant cycle of desire motivated by ignorance, with only a spark of consciousness. At this level, making things and doing things perpetuate ignorance, and there are many examples of neurotic manifestation: the blind piling up of objects and information, the corporate encouragement of mindless consumption, the power of attention siphoned off through television and other media. The inevitable frustration of such desire leads to either nihilism and despair, or else to spiritual fantasies of an “afterlife” that keep one from being engaged here and now. Within the urge of desire, however, is also the urge for illumination. And so the question becomes how are we going to act?

The celebrated Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavad Gita*, emphatically tells us that we act because we are obliged to—that we are literally moved into motion by enormous forces: by hunger, desire, by the weather, by the dynamic powers of nature. Seen in this light, our wanting demands an ongoing engagement with the realities of our existence. Our choice is not whether or not to want or to do, but how to want and how to do in the face of what is.

Some time ago, I was pushing my daughter on the swings in a park at twilight by the Hudson River. As I was looking past the river at the mountains of New Paltz, the river and the mountains suddenly transformed into the Ganges as it flows through Rishikesh in India. At the same time, I remained conscious that I was by the Hudson River bank while pushing my daughter on the swing. I knew that before my daughter was born, I had been in Rishikesh, and I sensed that a time would come when I would be back in Rishikesh. Perhaps I would wonder if any of this had actually happened, and yet it was happening. In that moment, I experienced an overwhelming and powerful opening into the great gift of being in front of the river, at that moment, pushing my daughter on the swings, *because* I knew it would not last forever. It was something akin to what the Japanese call *mano-no aware*, the deep sadness of life that opens into an appreciation of the beauty and love in a fragile and impermanent moment. The sadness of that moment was that someday my daughter would be too big for me to push on the swings, and that some day—all too soon—there would be no more swings and no more playground and we would both be in other places. But it was that fact that made that moment all the more precious.

Manifestation in this sense has to do with opening to the wisdom and destiny of our desire, with allowing circumstances to come into existence as well as with releasing them when it is time to let them go. Therefore, the work of manifestation is an art, but it is a very different type of “art-work” than that of producing objects or manipulating circumstances.

The process of manifestation is one of opening up to the preciousness of every moment and responding to it creatively. In this way it may be thought of as a compliment to mindfulness. We know that the bed will become unmade. We know that someday we will eventually die, but in this moment we are asked