

Coagulatio – Becoming Earth, Becoming Spirit.

Notes for a presentation on the theme of alchemy,
with particular reference to the operation of
Coagulatio. Illustrated with dreams.

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Introduction

For this exploration of aspects of alchemy, I have decided to write about coagulatio. Although in many ways this appears as a difficult option to take, as coagulatio is a mysterious operation which evades understanding, I am focussing on it here because of a call which I felt towards doing so. The operation has an immense grandeur and beauty. I approach this writing with a sense of reverence and awe, for this is the ultimate Becoming of the divine. The paper will look at how coagulatio may be understood, what promotes it, what it leads to, using dream illustrations (the dreamers have given full agreement to the inclusion of these dreams in this paper).

What is coagulatio?

Coagulatio is the appearance of solids out of that which is not solid. It is to do with form, becoming, and creation. We understand that it is spirit (called by alchemists mercury or quicksilver) which is to be coagulated – to be given form.

Form is not just the material form of the manifest material earth, although this is an important aspect of form. Form is also present at a subtle level – the soul is form. Thus we can understand that coagulatio describes the process of formation of subtle solids as well as dense ones, how the qualities in their archetypal unformed potentiality can become manifest through the medium of a human being – through their soul, body, heart – through their limited life.

Coagulatio holds fear for many – it can feel oppressive. Coagulatio is related to the earth, the element of density, form, cohesion, heaviness, slowness. And yet coagulatio is also the operation found in the establishment of more subtle form, and so it can be experienced as the victory, not the defeat. Two dreams illustrate this. The first is the dream of a 3 or 4 year old child, the second of the same person as an adult.

There is a thick black liquid oily substance on the garage floor of a local family. Grotesque black impish figures are arising out of the substance, dancing maniacally. They have huge heads, and they drip the black oily substance of which they are made and their dance creates them and creates more of them. I am horrified and recoil.

I am in the countryside and a flood begins. The waters rise from the ground as if from a ubiquitous spring. The water is pure and alive. I stand in it and it brings with it all qualities, they arise from it. They come in to being from it and by being there I can access them, they can access me.

The second dream has many solutio features, in that it is a dream of pure water arising from the earth, but the qualities coagulate from the water – they become accessible to creation through the agency of pure water (i.e. pure spirit). This brings to mind the alchemical maxim of ‘solve et coagule’, which has been said to be the essence of the alchemical process. In each dream something comes in to being out of something unformed – in the first dream dark and dense and maybe malevolent people, and in the second qualities, an aspect of form, out of spirit (the pure water).

The first dream quoted above is an illustration of an early experience of incarnating in to matter – of becoming human. It has some resonance with some creation stories discussed in Edinger, where earth is created from flooded land (the North American Indian myth of the earth diver who brought up bits of mud from the bottom of the sea, and the Hindu myth where the earth is churned from an ocean of butter). In the dream figures are created from liquid – they are of the liquid, but in a form. They are created by agitated dance. The dreamer begins to encounter the darkness of the world.

Lead, Sulphur and Magnesia

Lead helps us understand coagulation through consideration of its density and the sense of poison and impurity which are part of it. It describes that aspect of coagulation which is heavy. It reminds us of limitation. Lead links to the mind, the lower, monkey mind. The oppressive mind.

A child had the following recurrent nightmare, on a fairly frequent basis:

There is a massive metal spherical object hurtling through space towards the earth. It is tremendously powerful, heavy, maybe magnetic, certainly dangerous and compelling. It is made of poisonous dangerous stuff. When it passes the earth the people will stop – be frozen in exactly the position they are in at that moment, for all eternity. It is unstoppable. It will freeze and fix me and I am helpless to prevent the disaster.

This is a coagulatio dream – concerning the power of the mind. The spherical metal object is heavy and poisonous – it is akin to lead. Edinger tells us that lead is one of the agents of coagulation, linked to Saturn. In this dream the coagulation will be experienced as the stopping of the flow of life, imprisonment in stasis. This can be understood as the dream of a child becoming imprisoned by her mind, where the mind becomes the ruling principle for her (Saturn, the corrupt ruler, who swallows what is alive, eats his children).

The fact that this sphere was the mind only became clear to later in the therapy when the person dreamed that

there was a child, a boy, who had been cursed, apocalyptically cursed, and the sign of the curse was that he had metal roman numerals fused to his face.

The metal in this dream was the same metal as the sphere, we discovered this through using the waking dream technique (Hamilton 2013) it held the same feeling for the client – a need to recoil, a poison, something cold and hard and yet intense ‘like a headache, or a toothache’ he said. Taken together the dreams led us to understand that the sphere of the mind had collided with the child, encasing him and freezing him (by ‘him’, I mean a free and innocent spirit). This had been like a curse for this man. In the second dream the boy – the client’s soul - was beginning to recover.

For the human being to go through the journey of life coagulatio is necessary – the child must be fixed to form, a similar image (but at a different level of conscious development) to Christ being fixed to a cross. Fixatio is a synonym for coagulatio.

Some people feel trapped in their bodies. The experience of embodiment is becoming more and more difficult for modern people.

Thus in lead can be seen the aspect of limitation, in the sense of being brought down to earth, temporality, fixed. But without lead could there be gold? It is the lead which is to be purified.

Sulphur – Desire and Longing

Sulphur speaks to us of the sun energy – the fire which is the agent of coagulatio. There is an overlap with calcinatio. The desire pulls us in to being and pulls us in to the world. Edinger says ‘desire coagulates’. What is first coagulated? The ego. Why is this so? Why do we have an ego? We come to the central ontological question, what is the purpose of existence? This is a coagulatio question – what is going on? What is the point and purpose of form (gross, subtle and very subtle)? We read ‘I was a hidden treasure and I so longed to be known that I created the

creation in order that I could be known (or 'know you')'. Longing is central, the centre of the trinity of Love, Lover and Beloved. This is sulphur. Without longing there could be no knowing, no exchange.

Desire and sulphur, and coagulation are linked together here. We understand from that desire is purified by fire, by calcination.

First the wolf is subjected to the flames, and emerges as the lion (lesser king) – by this we understand that our basic instincts are burned up so that the discriminating effective ego can emerge, the self of the mature ego. This ego (the lion, lesser king) has been coagulated. It is then calcined. Out of this fire the King may emerge, the gold of the opus, the ego purified of greed and grasping and surrendered to the will of the divine. At each stage we see the interplay of fire and earth – the wolf has to be coagulated (early life), and is then burned up. Then the lion is born out of the fire – coagulated. Then this lion is subjected to the fire, from which the final coagulation can occur – the emergence of the body of the King.

A woman dreamed that *I was a perfumier, travelling to the house of the potter. I was taking a cart load of logs, cut to reveal the five pointed star. I was protecting two very special children. They have a serpent tattoo'ed on their foreheads. On the way I lay down to rest, finding a tiny Solomon's Seal plant by my bed* (a shade loving beautiful plant).

I told her that the six pointed star is 'Solomon's Seal', showing the balance of fires upwards and downwards. She had not known this connection.

A few weeks later she brought the dream *I had arrived at the potters house. I was being shown to her studio along a cave/corridor and I was shown that a vast room of her house had been converted in to an enormous kiln.*

There will be firing before the process is complete.

A few weeks after this she dreamed that *I had very very healthy food which would vaccinate people – protect them, especially children. I had been vaccinated twice already.* We understood this to refer to her having been coagulated twice, as wolf and as lion. The next stage of the process, the transformation to Queen, was yet to come. It was clearly going to be a big process!

So we can not discuss coagulation in a meaningful way without also being aware of other operations – here calcination and the purgation of desire and longing. There is clear indication in the above dreams that there is an imminent coagulation, (the image of the potter, the serpents 'fixed' to the children, the entry in to the cave of the potter, the food image in the third dream) and it is also clear that there is more to be

done to complete the process (a firing, or a vaccination, is required). The opus is dynamic, and although coagulatio is about being fixed it is also part of a whole process and flow of becoming and unbecoming. We are fixed in order that we may flow.

It is the energy of desire, longing which calls us both upwards towards heaven (and thus allows the coagulatio of the subtle in albedo) and down in to earthly manifestation. It is interesting that the same energy flows in both directions, and interesting that surrender to the requirement to Be, and Become is necessary. This surrender is the reason that the ego must keep dying throughout the process. 'Not my will but Thy will' – in the longing to fulfil the will of our destiny, we surrender in to the process of coagulatio – we allow ourselves to become.



Surrender and free will

It is through love for creation that we are created, and it is the absence of love for creation which pulls us away from it. Here is a poem by RS Thomas which describes the surrender and the love which makes us coagulated in to the bread which can feed.

The Coming

And God held in his hand
A small globe. Look, he said.
The son looked. Far off,
As through water, he saw
A scorched land of fierce
Colour. The light burned
There; crusted buildings
Cast their shadows; a bright
Serpent, a river
Uncoiled itself, radiant
With slime.

On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky. Many people

Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To return to its crossed
Boughs. The son watched
Them. Let me go there, he said.

And so we can see how sacrifice and love are linked together – sacrifice, the making holy of something – the transformation of lead to gold, of the body in to the bread of heaven which can feed spiritual food. But the food is only available when the sacrifice has been made, sacrifice of the grasping, concupiscent self. The dying of the lesser kings at each step of the way to leave us as receptive as the crescent moon awaiting the light of the sun to fill her, that she may reflect the light showing the beauty of the light to the world without the need to blind the eyes by trying to look straight at the sun.

Resisting coagulation and resisting the body

How does one overcome resistance to the body, to coagulation?

The acceptance of the body means the acceptance of imperfection and limitation. It is not just the acceptance of beauty and the earth, but of the dark. This often brings shame, a dark feature of coagulation.

What is shame? It is the sense that there is limitedness, and unlimitedness, and that the body (the feminine, beauty, simplicity) is part of limitedness. The more one attunes toward the unlimited the more one looks at the limited and realises how different it is. We look at ourselves and we find ourselves wanting. We feel broken by that.

But shame is a doorway, because it is a real feeling, connecting to reality, to longing, and posing to us the question – can it be said that God is over there and perfect, and I am over here and imperfect and therefore shameful? Or have I desecrated something by holding it as imperfect? How can I say I am separate? That denies God's omnipotence. So to reject a piece of the divine is a desecration. It is the ego's assumption of a separate crown. There is peace in accepting the totality.

Beauty

Over the years I have begun to notice how much beauty there is in the world. When I stray from the path what brings me back is the light in the trees, the feel of the breeze, the change of the seasons. Flowers, birds, the sky reflected on water, cobwebs in autumn. As each year

passes the world becomes more beautiful to me, there is more light, more colour, more days when the weather is just perfect, more moments when the beauty of the earth calls loud and clear, disallowing detachment from it. This is how I know I am becoming more coagulated. I can see the divine in the creation more and more and more. It is a great blessing. Often with clients I get an urge to do away with the wordy complexity of the therapy session, take them to the middle of the park and show them some trees, some light, some beauty, and allow that to speak to them of their own beauty.

Ugliness can be held in the beauty. I had a realisation as I visualised the lovely earth as we see it from space, a blue jewel in the vast sky, that the imperfections and dirtiness which we create on the earth can be absorbed by it, and do not taint its face. Perfection is only part of the story, and imperfection is only part of the story.

Knitting the world in to being

We have to accept coagulation and the body. I had a dream in which a spider landed on me, requiring acceptance. Here we have the image of the web weaver, and weaving, knitting, tapestry making all come up as coagulation images and Edinger speaks of some of them. The word 'spinster' describes the woman. There is a story that Sophia, the feminine principle of wisdom, weaves the elements in to being, alongside her companions – depth and silence. A client told me

Last night I dreamed that I was in a lace making shop – for sale were wooden shapes with nails banged in to them (think of fixation and the image of the cross to which we are nailed in coagulation). Upon these nails you weave the lace. I was going to buy a simple one, it was to make a lace angel for my mother. My father was handing it to me saying that he thought she would like that one.

The angel is thus created upon the frame of the wood and the nails.

This is coagulation.



