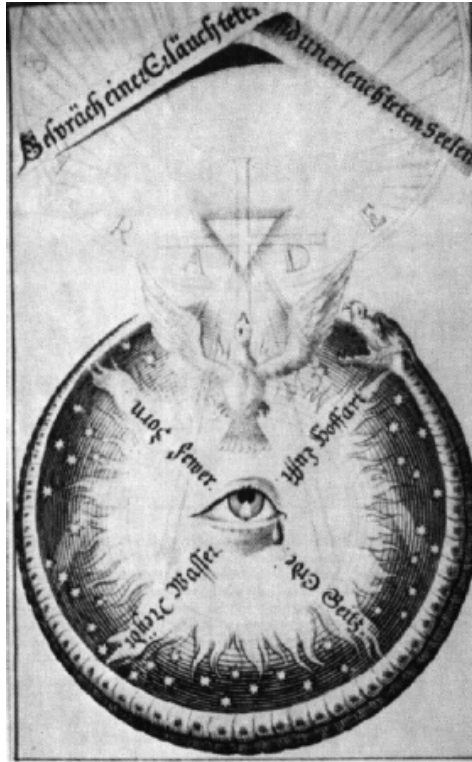


INITIATION, ALCHEMY AND LIFE

By Tommy Westlund



*There is no difference between eternal birth,
restoration from the Fall and the finding of the stone of the philosophers.*

(Jacob Boehme)

As a complement and sequel to my earlier article, *Initiation and Death*, the present text concerns aspects of what an initiation seeks to accomplish in a longer perspective, specifically after the dark night of the soul has been experienced and overcome. This is the basis of the path of inner alchemy – *Ars Royale* – the profound Royal Art. A further purpose is to show the relation between ritual magic and inner alchemy; so to speak paints a bigger picture of the nature and first end of the work, where ritual magic acts as a practical gateway into the profound mysteries of alchemy. Thus this article is written primarily for people already possessing some knowledge of the concepts of ritual magic, regardless of tradition. Also, the article aims at discussing different foundations and concepts of ritual magic, where magic and psychology differ, as well as the theoretical and practical applications that follow from that.

Seeds of wisdom in veils and metaphors

On the esoteric path in general, and its different rites of initiation in particular, we meet ancient dramas of symbolism whose purpose is to sow seeds of wisdom within us.¹ It is

¹ The term “ancient” here alludes to that they are built up around eternal or archetypal patterns of how the micro- & macrocosm work and interact, not on their historical, “real” age.

worth stressing that these seeds of wisdom are *sown* within us. No initiation, or magical work, does this automatically, or even necessitates an increase in wisdom. It is when we first manage to penetrate behind the veils of the symbols and understand their implications for us here and now that the seed can begin to grow and our inherent wisdom can start to blossom.

These inevitable veils and the manner of presenting them also tend to be, what to a great extent, distinguish literature and separate different Orders. In this regard the quality of their teaching and work depends upon a living tradition that has been integrated and to a certain extent also personified by the person or persons that aim at mediating the doctrines. It is this living, and as a rule oral tradition that renders possible the mediation of wisdom and understanding beyond the limitations of words. Words, to be able to be carriers of knowledge, need to be expressed from a personal understanding. The sense behind them, which is thus mediated through a living tradition, carries more keys within itself than is ever possible to describe in words.

Thus the adepts throughout history seek to instruct their successors by ancient dramas of symbolism and light up the paths that lead from the darkness of ignorance to the divine light. The difference between these rites and their exoteric equivalences is the individual “gnosis-process” which concerns itself with the *essence* of the Law (Maat), instead of faithfully following, applying or wrongly interpreting its outer reflection.

What then is the essence of this universal law, which has been taught within various esoteric traditions since the beginning of time? Well, behind the first veil, to see the importance of cycles and reflections and the significance of cause and effect concepts. As magicians we learn how to read, interpret and affect these, foremost within our own sphere of sensation and then being able to apply the same upon the world around us. This ability can concisely be said to summarize the modern understanding of magic and alchemy, which then are reduced to a holistic existential developmental psychology with an occult key signature. The magical and alchemical practices then contribute to what the famous psychologist C.G. Jung termed the individuation process, which also Jung considered that the alchemists, foremost unconsciously, had strived for throughout history. All alchemical theories and axioms were thus interpreted by him to just concern psychological processes, which perhaps was a necessary antithesis to the long lived belief that alchemy was just an attempt at physically transmuting non-precious metals into gold.

In my opinion this psychological interpretation, just as the tenacious gold making interpretation, neither gives a correct image of the work towards *Magnum Opus* (the Great Work) nor takes into consideration the light and wisdom that the adepts have tried to spread around the same.

The adepts, however, have always used codes and symbols that are hard to penetrate, both for preserving the purity in their wisdom and for erecting smoke screens in front of the eyes of the profane. The purpose in both cases was, and still is, that only those who

can *see*, i.e. have experienced gnosis and understanding, have awakened their inner wisdom, will be able to grasp the essence of the tradition. Hence they have not been too much concerned about existing misunderstandings about the nature and aim of the work. And even though it is my intention here to display the essence of Magnum Opus in clear words, this article will still leave intact many of the mysterious veils. Thus by necessity, not only because of this author's own lacking, and shortcomings, but also because the mysteries have always demanded silence as one of the most important principles for being able to progress on the path. In silence the seed of wisdom can grow, the unconscious can work on the symbolism, and the knowledge can be understood and transmuted into wisdom.



*In Torches, Candles, Spectacles
What Help may be
If People are Determined
Not to See*

The essence of Magnum Opus

The Great Work is about to create the mythical *Stone of the Wise*. What then is this stone? Well, nothing less than the means to immortality! This immortality, or eternal life, should however not be misunderstood. It does not mean that the body will never die - something that would be against the cycles and laws of nature. The alchemists have always maintained that their work is in harmony with nature and that they begin where nature ends, since some processes cannot be reconstructed without the help of nature. By eternal life is meant instead that consciousness remains after the death of the physical body and preserves into the next incarnation, and the following. This then is what the *stone, which isn't a stone* contains, the immortal consciousness of the adept.

Perhaps the most comical is that the adepts have always spoken in clear words regarding this, but despite this, only a few have understood its meaning. So to eliminate eventual misunderstandings it is worth repeating; Magnum Opus leads to eternal life, not in the same body but the ability to move and transcend consciousness after the death of the physical body - an eternal birth that does not involve a "fall of consciousness".

Consciousness and death

This leads us unsought to one of the most misunderstood existential concepts; what happens with our consciousness, our self, after the physical death. In modern times, foremost the spiritualist movement and its branches have put forth the idea that anyone can remember earlier lives (and thus preserve consciousness after death), which in the eyes of the adepts is a somewhat naïve opinion. There are today plenty of courses, groups and therapists that feather their own nests on peoples need to be seen, to at least have been an important person once somewhere in a previous life. The majority of these so-called "memories" derives from the individual and/or collective unconscious. The psychological research of the last century clearly shows how the symbols of the unconscious arise and come forth either as a confirmation of psychological needs or as a contrast or antithesis to conscious opinions. The interpretation that it has to do with memories from previous lives can in best cases be accurate from the hypothesis that one

can “tune” into archetypal memories, which partly could explain the multitude of people remembering incarnations as Cleopatra, Ramses II, Caesar, Napoleon, etc. Personally, however, I consider the majority of such cases as originating from the astral and illusional dimensions of Yesod. In any case it is an abyss of difference between this and what the adepts alludes to.



In ancient Egypt, this ability was described by a sun with two wings - the sun, symbol of the self (consciousness) together with a pair of wings, the ability to travel between the worlds. This was the symbol of the winged Horus, which the Pharaoh would be transmuted to after his or her embalming process (in the identification with Osiris), to thereafter be able to regain the lawful place amongst the gods and goddesses.

The Egyptian rites sought to prepare the candidate (most often the Pharaoh or close relative to him/her) for all the trials that the soul was believed to face after death. Above all in the later rites (starting with ‘the book of coming forth by day’ – more commonly known as ‘the book of the dead’) these journeys and trials took place in Amenti, the Egyptian death realm where Osiris ruled. In the earlier rites, from the first dynasties, the journeys and trials took place in the sky.²

A concept, which is present already in the early Egyptian descriptions of “life after death”, is the importance of understanding that one has actually died, and then to have the capacity for an individual consciousness after death. This can be compared with the ability for lucid dreaming, where the dreamer is fully conscious that what is experienced is a dream and at the same time retain individual memories and experiences. Death resembles falling asleep where the conscious slowly ebbs out into various heavens or hells, for them loosening all aspects of individual memories and experiences.

From this one might think that the ability of lucid dreaming constitutes the key that opens up the portals between the worlds (both before and after death), but that is not the case. Lucid dreams, as astral travels, generally take place within the seven palaces of Assiah³, located within the treacherous astral-illusional mists of Yesod. Further, the “astral

² In both the first pyramid texts from the 5th dynasty (around 2500 BC) and the later coffin texts from the 11th dynasty (around 2000 BC) the journey started in the east to follow the course of the Sun over the sky. From the 18th dynasty and the new kingdom the journeys and trials took place in Duat in the netherworld. The significance of this topic will be explained in an upcoming article.

³ The Nephesh, the astral body, is divided into its seven Palaces, combining the Sephirotic influences in their most material forms. That is, the world of passions dominated by the Ruach, or by the world that is beyond. That is, its Sephiroth are passionate, expressing a passionate dominion. Thus, its three Supernal Sephiroth, Kether, Chokmah and Binah, are united in a sense of feeling and comprehending impressions. Its Chesed is expressed by laxity of action. Its Geburah by violence of action. Its Tiphareth is expressed by more or less sensual contemplation of beauty, and love of vital sensation. Its Hod and Netzach, by physical

body” is connected with the physical body and requires a great amount of energy from the same to allow consciousness to be separated from the body for a longer period of time. This is often symbolically described as a silver cord combining the two bodies, and everyone who has had an out-of-body-experience know the kind of difficulties that soon arises in regards to the capacity to regain a focused consciousness.

The astral body, or body of light (the Kabbalistic *Nephesch*) was viewed by the Kabbalists as being the “true” body, of which the physical body is but a reflection. It is the bonds of this etheric body with the various urges in the seven palaces of Assiah that the esoteric traditions have sought to clarify and work with. For it is first when the urges can be controlled that the adept truly can be called a free human, no longer governed by unconscious impulses and influences. This is a very simple description of the esoteric meaning of the fall and the restoration there from.

Within certain traditions complete asceticism has been promoted, while others have gone to the opposite end and promoted indulgence within all palaces and urges so that they thereby can lose their grip. Many of the modern esoteric traditions teach methods of how to know these aspects of oneself (i.e. to make them conscious) so that one no longer is ruled by them, although there still are many moral values that make this difficult. This aspect of liberation strongly resembles Jung’s individuation process, from which there does not exist any real difference between magical and psychological work. However, what distinguishes the magical alchemy from psychology is that this work takes place for the purpose of being able to create a *new body*, which is more spiritual than the physical body but more physical (i.e. constant) than the astral body. This is one of the esoteric meanings of the three alchemical principles, Sulphur ⚞, Mercury ☿ and Salt ⊖, which shall be separated, purified and recombined. First then can the *Stone of the Wise* be produced; the spiritual body that can travel between the worlds, and which is not dependent upon the physical body.

Thus the alchemical-magical process does not seek to escape neither from the earth nor from the body, but to refine the latter and thereby, with the assistance of its energies, form the *stone*. A very simplified description of this process follows.

Prima Materia

No alchemical work can start or take place without the alchemist being fully aware of what its *prima materia*, its original material, is. However, this is a subject that has perplexed aspirants throughout the centuries, since all alchemists has described *prima materia* in symbolic terms which often seems to resemble zen koans than anything understandable and concrete. From alchemical classical works we can read that *materia prima* is lead, the dragon, urine, dew, the water of life, cinnabar, the eagle stone, the poison, the virgin milk, chaos, honey, gold, silver, etc.

wellbeing and health. Its Yesod is expressed, by physical desires and gratifications. Malkuth, by absolute increase and domination of matter in the material body.

To make the understanding of *prima materia* easier, it should help to know what the alchemist aims at extracting from there, namely the philosophic or inner Salt \ominus . This Salt, also called VITRIOL, contains the two other principles, Mercury ☿ and Sulphur ♁ . By softening and extracting the water element from the earthly darkness, the spirit of Mercury is extracted which is variously called *the white lily*, *the eagle* or *the dragon*. It is from this that the art around the Stone of the Wise is based and founded, as it contains the volatile fire, the *philosophical Sulphur* – the most pure ingredient of the Stone of the Philosophers.

The truth is that both *prima materia* and its *stone* depend upon the purpose of the alchemical operation. If one aims at producing an elixir, its *prima materia* can be a specific plant or mineral, where one so to speak takes the *prima materia* that nature itself has produced and developed as far as possible, and then “refines” it. As the purpose with this article is the concept of eternal life, we will not need to look for our *prima materia* within the plant or mineral kingdoms. In inner alchemy, *Ars Royale* or the Royal Art, there is only one conceivable *prima materia*, the Temple of our Spirit.⁴ (This, however, has not stopped alchemists from, in laboratory environment, using everything from body secretion to excrements as *prima materia*, with no other result than blood, sweat and tears.) The work starts with the physical body, which is the first key of the work. In the magical work this means the necessity to ground every experience and insight in the physical body. In inner alchemy the *Athanasia* of the alchemists is the physical body.

The alchemists have thereafter in broad outlines divided the process into three stages, *nigredo*, *albedo* and *rubedo*. In each phase takes place the works of separating, purifying and recombining the three principles of Salt, Sulphur and Mercury; our body, soul and spirit.

Alchemical principle	Entity	Effect	Nature
\ominus Salt	Body	Combining	Fixed
♁ Sulphur	Soul	Burning	Mutable
☿ Mercury	Spirit	Dissolving	Volatile

Nigredo

This stage has been more thoroughly discussed in the article *Initiation and Death* (with a magical-psychological emphasis). In a concise way, it is the art of dissolving the illusionary self into its smallest elements and facing the *dark night of the soul*. It is the black phase where the roots of the *Nephesh* with the seven palaces of Assiah shall be liberated, so that consciousness and will can be centered in the *Ruach* (approximate equivalent to the self in psychology). The focus is to separate \ominus from ☿♁ , so that the spirit can burn the \ominus into a white ash, its essence, and extract its soul from the same.

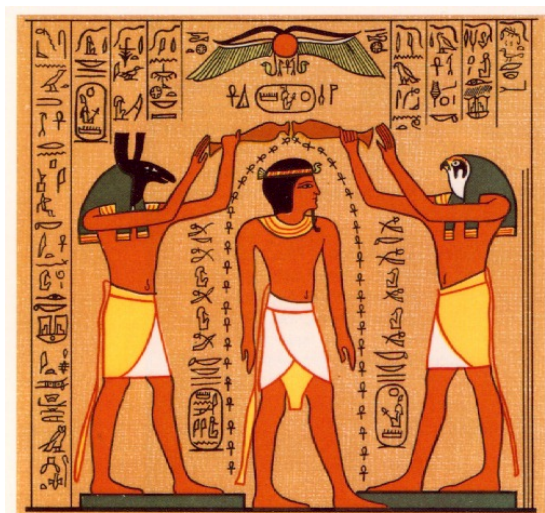
In Egyptian mythology, this phase can be compared with the journey of the dead soul through Amenti, the death realm, where perils constantly threaten to terminate the

⁴ The reader is here asked to meditate upon what that term actually implies.

journey before the goal has been reached. This archetypal journey is the same as the Sun, Ra, was considered to do each night, and it was far from obvious that the journey would have a happy ending. The dead soul has to endure many trials before finally entering into the Hall of Maat and there meet Osiris, the ruler of the netherworld. If the heart of the deceased managed to balance the feather of Maat, truth, i.e. if the person had lived a life in accordance with Maat, the journey could continue.



From an initiatory perspective, the candidate has met and liberated the bonds of the Nephesch from the seven palaces of Assiah, and regained the true inner throne as a King or Queen. Videlicet, received the ability to consciously rule oneself instead of being ruled by inner and outer influences and circumstances. The basic condition for this is that the shadow or the dweller at the threshold has been met and overcome/integrated. Interesting to note here is that this is very clearly depicted in the Egyptian traditions. The god Seth had long since been identified with darkness, destructibility and chaos. However, in the picture beneath, it is Seth and Horus who together crown the pharaoh⁵ - Light and darkness in perfect harmony.



⁵ Seth was originally a greatly valued god and the only entity that could face the gaze of the chaos snake Apepi without being paralyzed, and he was thus a natural and esteemed participant on the bark of Ra. It was first during the later dynasties that he became associated with evil and chaos. The picture shows how Seth and Horus jointly crown the Pharaoh Seti I from the 19th dynasty (around 1300 BC).

This process is often described in moral terms in the classical books, but can also be seen from another perspective. All the complexes and urges that we unconsciously carry within us cost an enormous amount of energy to sustain. Instead of doing what we really intend to do, we build castles in the air with different scenarios about what could happen, what should have been said, how our environment will react if we do a, how we will react if the same says b, what the person really meant when saying c, etc, etc. All this energy not only attaches us with the seven palaces, it is also greatly needed for the upcoming work.

Albedo

Albedo is the white phase, which allows the influx from the *Ruach* into the sphere of sensation (*Ruach* as the reflection of *Neschamah* – the inherent divinity of mankind).⁶ This phase is in most cases filled with energy, power and insights that continuously want to manifest. ☿ and ♀ shall here be separated, which is done by the burned ☉ from the previous phase. The moist shall be made dry, and the dry shall be made moist. The body shall be changed into a soul by the power of the spirit, and the soul shall be transformed into a spirit.

The new body of light or diamond body is created in the albedo phase, but it is still not constant, i.e. it is possible to use and work with it but the work is far from completed. The dead soul has identified itself with Osiris and reached contact with its holy guardian angel. The burned white ash from the previous phase is put as a shelter around the body, which without exaggeration can be viewed as a mummification. In the contact with the guardian angel, the prerequisite for the next phase is created. The cut up Osiris meets his spouse Isis, and by her magic the new body is created, personified by their child Horus. It is very significant that Osiris, according to the myth, was cut up in 14 pieces (the double aspects of the planets and the seven active and passive phases of the work), which Isis had to travel over the Nile (the river of Life) to find, one after the other. However, she only managed to find 13 but received assistance from Thoth (Logos) to recreate the last piece, the phallus of Osiris. In alchemical literature this is described as, without the divine aid the first stone will never be found or created, regardless of how much the alchemist tries.



⁶ Or rather it means that the sphere of sensation expands to encompass the *Ruach*.

Gentle said this phase involves a paradigm shift for the aspirant, both in regards the design of the personal work and the understanding of the process as a whole. A former luna ☽ consciousness here starts to manifest as a solar ☼ consciousness. It is again necessary to identify and resolve bound up energies, however not in the same manner as earlier since the focus is *another* body.

Some words need to be said about the colours of these two phases, black and white. Even though these are in an opposite relationship with each other, and black for many people has a more negative tone than white, they have a much more profound meaning in alchemy. The first black phase in no way needs to be experienced as “black” according to the common present definition. On the contrary, it is generally speaking experienced as a life giving and expanding phase. To again allude to the Egyptian mysteries, the colour black represented life since the yearly flooding of the Nile left a wide black zone of slag behind, with the result that the desert bloomed and the earth fertilized. Likewise the white colour of the Albedo phase does not mean that everything is easy, splendid and wonderful. Hence it is not surprising that many chose to end the work here, after the white stone has been made.

Rubedo

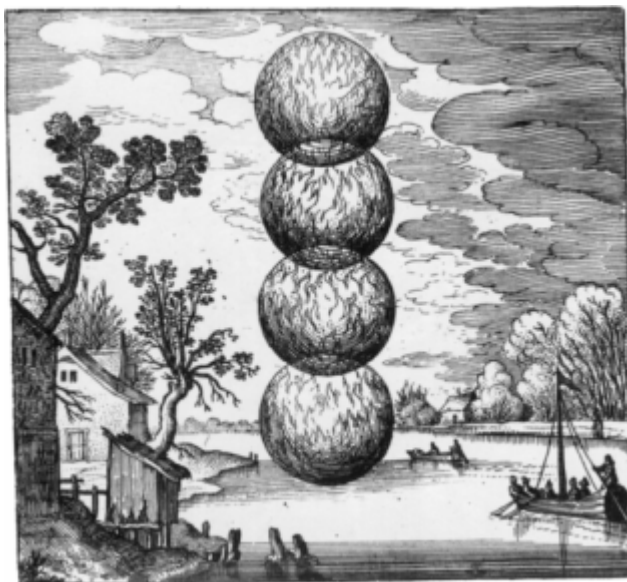
Rubedo is the red phase where the power of the spirit shall fill up the blood of the physical body and make the new diamond body constant. ☿ shall be brought back to ☾ for creating the *mercury of the philosophers*. The inner fire shall further be projected to imbue all bodies. The divine child Horus is being born and at risk, as in the myth, facing the exploits of his uncle Seth. However, by protection from Isis and the guardian angel and continuous focused work, the stone, which is not a stone, the red elixir, the gold of the philosophers and the projection powder can finally be manifested as the sun incarnate in matter. The work, however, does not end here; instead the whole process is repeated once more, but this time with the red elixir as the prima materia in what the alchemists call the process of projection.



Although this might sound easy in comparison with the earlier phases, the whole work can be spoiled during this process. The *Neschamah* here fills the newly created *Nephesch* with a passion and strength that can burn up the latter if it is not done with caution. And this leads us to the different fires that will be used and applied during the work.

The four fires

During the process and phases the alchemist utilizes four different inner fires, which are associated both with the four elements and the four body fluids.⁷ The fire most commonly known today is called *kundalini* in eastern terminology, and has become a very well known term in the western society during the last century. There exist many myths around kundalini, but without exaggeration I think that whoever manages to arouse it will never forget that experience. One will have to search long for a more



intense energy than that. Personally it felt like the climax of the orgasm extended to forty minutes the first time. The first twenty minutes were fantastically wonderful, the remaining so wonderful that they became painful. After having been used to the intense energy I started to question what it all was good for, what purpose it served. For sure I could use the power in ceremonies, but something told me that this was but a subsistent purpose. First many years later, after having entered deeply into alchemical studies, I understood its relation with the fires of alchemy, and how the initiatic process and the magical work in a subtle way teaches how this force shall be transmuted.

In the magical process the work with the inner fire starts with the preliminary earth related work. By physical movements, vibrations and breathing exercises the blood circulation and absorption of oxygen increases in the body. The immediate result is a raised body temperature, the mildest of the alchemical fires (which in an exoteric environment can be seen at winters when freezing people give themselves body-fires). However, the reader is advised not to interpret this fire as a simple aerobic exercise.

In the following air-related work the relation between the vibrations, the breathing exercises and the visualizations deepen in the personal ritual work. The blood absorbs oxygen in accordance with the nature of the ritual in a completely different manner.⁸ This, together with an increased intellectual grounding and insight of the work, leads to a noticeable stronger heat in the body. The intellectual grounding can be compared with

⁷ Body fluids are still being used by some alchemists of the Royal path.

⁸ Blood alludes to gold and the sun in alchemy.

the sensation which arises when one has struggled with an apparently insoluble problem and right out of the blue sees the solution.

The water-related work creates a deeper emotional bound to the above concept. This is the heat that comes from understanding on a deeper level, to see the overall picture. The water-fire can also be compared with heat that comes with being in love.

The fire related work endeavors both to identify and arouse the inner fire and to open up the link with the divine; the strong and creative flow and heat directly from the *Neschamah*.

These four fires must all be experienced, identified and closely worked with before the Albedo phase can begin. The goal is to have them as easily accessible that only a short focus is required to arouse them, together or separate, according to where in the process one works. Common to them is that they all increase the body temperature, and they are utilized in the work for separating, purifying and combining the different bodies in the processes. A secondary effect is that they are also very useful in relation with group rituals and initiation ceremonies.

Inner and outer alchemy

Before ending this article, I will shortly mention something about the relationship between inner and outer alchemy. If we disregard the opposite poles of psychological interpretations and the attempts to create gold, we find that inner alchemy has throughout history always contained elements of both outer and inner character. As was mentioned in regard of the four fires, these correspond with the four body fluids and have been used in many traditions of the *Ars Royale*. Some traditions also require that certain elixirs must be produced and ingested, for assisting the demanding processes with purification, strength and power. My personal opinion is that the majority of these are no longer necessary, since we today are much more conscious about what our food contains in form of carbohydrates, fats, fibers etc., and the fact that our living conditions have been much improved during the last centuries. In this regard everything is not necessarily better than before. However, some “external” processes still seem to be necessary, but these I will leave for the reader to find out.

So with the hope that both the initiation process has been given a wider and deeper perspective and that the relationship between magic and alchemy has been pointed out, I wish you good luck with your future work towards the stone of the wise, true happiness, SUMMUM BONUM.

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