

4. Zirconium

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Stage 4: Over the Threshold

Now it's getting serious. You've committed yourself and found a way in. With a decisive first step, you're crossing the threshold to an uncertain future. You pause as you step over the threshold. Will it work out well? Everything is so new. With so many unknowns, it all seems highly risky. You've got the key in your hand and have just gone through the gate – you stand in awe, but what now? You could still turn back, but only with great difficulty, because your commitment to enter the new territory is definite. There's a big obstacle apparently blocking the way, and it's unclear what's behind it: as if in a milky haze, you can't grasp it, yet you want to know what's lying hidden there. Half-way across, you stand stunned in the middle of the bridge as if in a fog, only dimly able to recognize the outlines of what's on the far bank. If you let yourself be put off by all the unknown factors, you'll fail in the middle of the official beginning. Yet if you pull yourself together and if you can bring yourself to act, despite the uncertain future, you'll find it will be easier than you think, and it'll work out. Things are looking up. You feel an unbelievable sense of amazement: can it really be this easy? It's like jumping in at the deep end. You have entered the new world.

Key concepts: Threshold. Committing. Confirming. Foundation. Official. Passage. Transition. Bridge. Key. Gate. Half here, half there. (In)decisive. Doubt whether it will succeed. Nebulous goals. Uncertain future. Everything is new. Amazement. Awe.

Stage 4 of the Silver series: Zirconium

<p><i>Stage 4:</i> Threshold. Committing. Confirming. Foundation. Official. Passage. Transition. Bridge. Key. Gate. Half here, half there. (In)decisive. Doubt whether it will succeed. Nebulous goals. Uncertain future. Everything is new. Amazement. Awe.</p>	<p><i>Silver series:</i> Communicating ideas. Power of thought. Disseminating knowledge. Intellectual display. Show. Fame. Publicity. Science. Art. Culture. Creativity. Originality. Aesthetics. Elegance. Sensitive sense of honor. Subtle arrogance. First Lady.</p>
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Combinations of key concepts indicating Zirconium

- Doubt whether the new idea will be acknowledged on the first presentation
- The great idea is acclaimed in public for the first time
- The first opening day of an exhibition by a promising but unknown artist
- To receive the key to understanding: initiation
- Artist seals a deal with the producer: recording contract
- The advertising contract with a star should make the unknown company famous: sponsoring
- The scientific experiment fails at the official launch
- It's just been cast, the bell that will in future call the faithful to prayer, and is about to be inaugurated: hopefully, it will sound good

Zirconium as substance

The most important mineral containing zirconium is a silicate called zircon (ZrSiO_4). It has been known as an ornamental stone since antiquity. The element was discovered in 1789 by Klaproth when investigating a sample of the mineral from Ceylon. Its name comes either from the Arabic *zarqun*, cinnabar or from the Persian *zargun*, gold-colored. We can recognize these words in jargon, which is the term used to describe light-colored zircon.

Zirconium, which was formed up to 4.4 billion years ago, is the oldest known mineral on the earth or the moon, and is one of the

most commonly occurring minerals in the earth's crust. The ultrapure form is a steel-gray, shiny metal that is relatively soft and malleable, although the slightest impurity considerably increases the hardness. Hafnium (stage 4 of the Gold series), with which it is frequently associated, is especially hard to separate from zirconium. Therefore, even ultrapure zirconium retains some slight traces of hafnium.

The spark that starts the fire: When warmed to more than 100°C (212°F), powdered zirconium spontaneously ignites. Once it has started burning, the fire cannot be extinguished with water, otherwise there will be an explosion, the same as with magnesium. The fire can only be put out by smothering it with salt or sand. In pure oxygen, finely powdered zirconium burns with the maximum temperature of any metal, 4660°C (8420°F). Since it burns with a very bright flame, it is used for fireworks and warning lights. Smokeless flashlight powder no longer contains magnesium; instead, it is composed nowadays of zirconium, so as to generate a very bright light. Zirconium produces a stream of sparks when it hits a metal surface. The movie industry makes use of this effect to dramatize the hail of bullets in action movies. Militarily, zirconium is the incendiary portion of the horrifying cluster bombs used in the Iraq war. Each tiny bomb released from the main cluster bomb contains, together with the shrapnel, a zirconium ring as the incendiary device.

Stable bridges in modern dentistry: Due to their hardness, splinters of zirconium oxide are also used to manufacture dental disks (zirconium corundum). Yttrium-zirconium ceramics have an extremely high fracture toughness. As a highly stable frame for dental crowns and bridges, they are increasingly replacing gold crowns. Metallic zirconium is very resistant to corrosion. It is used to build chemical plants. Zirconium alloys are used for surgical instruments. Zirconium dioxide crystals strongly refract light. Therefore, they are often worked like diamonds and sold as artificial gemstones, known as zircons.

Zirconium only occurs in small amounts (4 mg/kg) in the human body and is not toxic.

Zirconium Case Histories

4.1 Zirconium metallicum and the Pearl

Inhibited before a solo performance due to fear of the unknown

The 16-year-old female patient comes because she's been having headaches for the last seven months and is getting steadily weaker. She feels a pressure on her head "like I'm wearing a very tight helmet". Her period doesn't come for up to eight weeks at a time. She has a cyst in the left ovary. The gynecologist wanted to prescribe her the contraceptive pill, but she refused. During singing lessons, she suffers from hoarseness and a sore throat. She often withdraws and wants to be alone. I ask her what was going on seven months ago, when the weakness and headaches started. "That was my first big solo performance as a singer. I'd been preparing for it for ages." She sang the solo in an operetta. Shortly before the performance, she'd fallen ill with hoarseness and her voice became blocked. But on no account did she want to call off the show. She pulled it off somehow and was amazed that it went so well despite the problems with her voice. It was a big success. Yet afterwards she became really unwell, and has since been anxious before every performance. Since that time, she's just not been right at all. The ear, nose, and throat (ENT) specialist said that she has inflammation of the vocal chords with polyps.

Since childhood, she's been actively interested in the arts. When she first came to our practice at the age of 11 due to a straightforward case of flu, she wanted to come in to see me on her own, leaving her mother in the waiting room. She comes across as gentle, reserved, cautiously self-confident, and somewhat uneasy. It's as if, behind her gentle eyes, there's a deep inner world dreaming dozily away. Her large mouth is quite special. It's shyly closed and yet expressive, as if keeping a secret, while anxiously holding back the lower lip. The mouth smiles quietly, as if holding a lot back, which will later be expressed. For four years, she was in the ballet and danced particularly well to "the quiet music of Sinéad O'Connor". She plays the violin. She can cook, clears up her room on her own, and keeps

everything in order. She repeatedly has phases when her self-confidence is poor. She then withdraws and comes to terms with it on her own. Nobody is allowed in: her room is her own private retreat. At the age of 12, she suddenly doesn't dare to play in public again, although she's a good violin player. She doesn't want to open up, and even shuts herself off from her family, writing her diary. She does her homework on her own and doesn't show any weakness. A year later, she thinks she'd like to become a photographer; at any rate, she definitely wants a creative career of some sort. She sings in a choir. But she's not sure about being a soloist because she'd then be so much in the limelight. She's been trying to sing solo for the past few months, including karaoke. At the age of 14, she takes singing lessons and sings soprano, for example, at school festivals. She's now 16 and is fully developed. She appears more self-confident, although the inner shyness and cautiously anxious reserve is still noticeable.

Analysis, Prescription, and Progress

Rhodium 200C, the main remedy for artists with stage fright (Silver series stage 9), doesn't really help. It makes her feel worse to begin with, then helps a bit, but her voice is still hoarse. A more precise analysis might immediately point to the correct remedy, if we could just correctly understand the anamnesis, but sometimes you get blocked (especially in stage 4!), and instead you pick up the repertory to overcome the blockage by the "certainty" of the symptoms. In this case, *Reference Works* is the source of inspiration. The term "helmet" combined in the same sentence with "as if" – the sensation of a tight helmet characterizing the main complaint, that is, the headaches – results in a list of 14 remedies, where we immediately notice Zirconium⁶ as a Silver series remedy. There is much to indicate a remedy from the Silver series: the problem with the voice, the artistic career of singer, the emotional refine-

⁶ The symptom of the too-tight helmet comes from a proving by Jan Scholten: "headache in the evening, it felt as if I was wearing a tight helmet." This sensation is not quite the same as the well-known "skullcap" from the old literature. (*Homoeopathy and the Elements*, Scholten, 1996, p. 556)

ment with an early and well-developed sense of the fine arts. And then things suddenly all fall into place and we see how to overcome the hurdle. The situation of the shy artist, who is still unsure and who falls ill on her first big solo appearance is typical for the fourth stage of the Silver series, Zirconium. In stage 4, she's overcome the acute blockage and is crossing the threshold; she's self-confident enough for that, but the inner uncertainty and doubt catch up with her and start to nag away at her, the feeling of not knowing whether she is sure enough to go on. She's made it through the performance and has overcome the hoarseness for the moment, yet hasn't been able to recover afterwards. Stage 4 is like a more advanced stage 2, which also likes to withdraw, yet the uncertainty is less than for stage 2, and there's enough initiative to make a definite decision; nevertheless, the uncertainty then catches up with her again. She's strong enough to successfully bring off the performance and to overcome the initial difficulties, yet then she falls ill.

She takes *Zirconium metallicum* LM6 once a day. After six weeks, she comes back and tells us what happened: the weakness improved after a few days, and after a week she's once more feeling strong and well. The headaches have also gone. But the sore throat is unchanged, so she saw the ENT doctor again: the results of the laryngoscopy were somewhat better but still not fully normal. She says: "My voice is still not clear – it's as if there's something stuck in there. I can only feel it when I swallow, as if then I have to swallow past something that's in the way. It's like a small white ball, round and soft, a bit smaller than a hazel nut. It's only soft on the outside; the inside is hard." Since this symptom hasn't improved after six weeks on *Zirconium*, I can't resist the temptation: the sensation of the ball reminds me strongly of a pearl. Externally white and softly gliding, internally hard: that's a good description of the pearl, the moon-like, shimmering jewel of the Silver series. And isn't she like a pearl still lying inside the mussel? Why not try it? So she takes *Pearl* 1M. After 2-3 days, she can no longer feel the ball and the hoarseness disappears. She's been well for the last year. Her periods are also normal once more. She's now in Paris as an exchange pupil.

Remember the first Rubidium patient in this book, who was also drawn to this “silver” city of the arts?

Comments

This case is not fully Zirconium, yet the headaches – exactly reflected in the proving symptom – disappear, and also the general sense of wellbeing improves. In addition, the weakness that had been increasing ever since she entered the Zirconium state disappears. It’s just the polyps on the vocal chords that call for the dose of *Pearl* in order to soften. Two remedies were needed here.

4.2 Zirconium metallicum

Bombarded by too many tasks in middle management: a case of glomerulonephritis

The patient has a position in middle management. He recently took on a difficult professional assignment: in fact, he generally takes on too much. Much of it is new to him, and he hopes he will be able to manage it all. At night, he tosses and turns in bed, then a number sticks in his head and he can’t get rid of it; it’s always whole numbers, like 4, 7, or 0. In the course of two weeks, he starts to have pulsing pains in the back of his head, and he develops a sensation of fever without any actual fever. He feels really ill: he has something like muscle aches all over and he lies in bed all day. His condition starts to give cause for concern. A home visit reveals percussion tenderness in the area of both kidneys, with protein in the urine, both of which indicate a kidney inflammation. His temperature is now 38.6°C (101.5°F). The high blood pressure of 200/120 – something he doesn’t normally have – is also alarming and strengthens the suspicion of nephritis. The suspicion of acute glomerulonephritis is confirmed in hospital. When he’s discharged two weeks later with two blood pressure medications and penicillin, he’s feeling somewhat better, yet the diastolic blood pressure is still around 100. He still has headaches at night, sees the disturbing numbers, and cannot sleep properly. He feels better when he sits up in bed.