

WE ARE ALL GRAIL KNIGHTS

There has been a trend over the last twenty or so years to demystify the stories of King Arthur and to try to show that he was really just a minor warlord of no real importance. This is a sure sign of the materialisation of the age - when we have lost our imagination and need to fit everything into the moneymaking spiritually barren ideals of modern society. The fantasy film 'The Never Ending Story' expressed this very well with its plot about a "nothingness" engulfing the world of the imagination due to people being unable to visualise anything beautiful and archetypal – the fatal "seeing is believing" philosophy holds precedence in the world, but most of what is good, true and beautiful cannot be seen and never will be!

Many writers, including John Matthews, have expressed the idea that King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, along with all the characters, both male and female, were and are archetypes that we can all identify with and that the Holy Grail is symbolic of a state of consciousness that we all seek in our own way, broadly fitting the archetypes.

It is also suggested that the Knights of the Round Table made up a mystic Brotherhood and Merlin was their Guru - that they went through many trials and initiations, some succeeding and some failing and these are included in the many tales. There are also parallels in the stories of other countries. India, China, Japan, South America, Australia and just about every other country in the world have their grail stories. Only recently I have been re-watching an old Japanese TV series, Monkey, which is the story of a quest to bring the Buddhist scriptures from India to China with the motive to end suffering. The main characters are a Buddhist Priest named Tripitaka, a pig creature representing the lustful and gluttonous elements of our nature, a sea monster which relates to other negative elements in our being and Monkey who is the mind - restless and chaotic at times but striving to be still - also he has many powers showing that, as HPB says in the Inner Group Teachings, there are enormous mysteries connected to the Lower Manas:

"It is possible for it to act differently in like conditions, for it has reason and self conscious knowledge of right and wrong, and good and evil, given to it. It is in fact endowed with all the attributes of the Divine Soul. In this Ray is the Higher Manas, the speck of responsibility on earth."

It is significant that although Monkey seems to be irresponsible and silly in the story he is the one who protects his companions in difficult times - he sees through the Maya that certain demons project and guides them through difficult terrain and situations. Again highly symbolic, as they search for the spiritual teachings, their Holy Grail.

One can read countless similar tales in the mythology of the world, all describing the search that goes on in our very hearts, for, as Bhavani Shankar says in his brilliant book *"The Doctrine of the Bhagavadgita"* talking about the enlightenment of humanity as the goal:

"For this purpose he need not scour the *lokas*, for from his own heart always flows a current of living moral and spiritual energy for the good of the three worlds, more potent and dynamic in its purifying and elevating effect than any number of lectures or orations, whether on the physical or astral or some higher planes."

So the search is in an inner one, but these tales have a definite effect on our consciousness.

I have always been fascinated by the tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, more than anything else in my life. The imagery idea and characters are wonderful to me. In a world where we are bombarded with so many negative images it is brilliant to be able to sink our minds into the beauty of a world that is filled with magic, mystery and love and where justice rules in the end. The characters and landscapes are also very evocative and relate to definite areas of our consciousness. It is also, like the Bhagavad-Gita, the Ramayana and many other tales, the age-old story of the battle between so called good and evil or between selfish and unselfish impulses in each one of us. The characters are very real to me and certainly convey something to the inner man or woman.

So we have the familiar characters like Sir. Lancelot - who was a true and good knight and yet who could not achieve the grail due to his adulterous love for Arthur's wife Guinevere. Karma at work. We have the character inserted into the story by the Christians, Galahad, who was the son of Lancelot and Elaine the grail princess. He was so pure that he resisted all temptation with ease and became the only knight to attain full realisation of the goal, we have Gawain originally the Knight of the Goddess, but out of favour with the patriarchal Christians, and Arthur himself who was a true Divine King, at one with the land

which ailed when he did as the two were one. Also Parsifal, the pure fool, who through innocence and many trials became the grail keeper which office is connected to the mysterious figure of Prester John. Alice Leighton Cleather and Basil Crump in their book on Wagners Operas Lohengrin and Parsifal refer to:

"...that mysterious personage, Prester John...who is so intimately connected with the Legend of the Holy Grail. About him very little appears to have been definitely known, save the exalted nature of his office and his great wisdom and purity of character." They connect the grail with the East and say that:

"...the Grail came originally from the East; and it was brought from its mountain fastnesses in India (probably the Himalayas) and placed in the sanctuary at Monsalavat in the Pyrenees, in order to spread its light and wisdom in western lands. When the mission was concluded, the Brotherhood returned once more to the East with the Sacred Vessel."

It would seem that Cleather and Crump are suggesting that the Grail is something tangible rather than just symbolic or perhaps they are using the symbol of the Grail to suggest the spread of Spirituality to the West from the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas who dwell in the Himalayas. Let's look at the Grail in its various manifestations.

It is a very colourful world and into this enters the Grail transformed from a mystical cauldron in pagan mythology to the cup that held the blood of Christ in the Christianised version of the tale. Says Derek Bryce in his book "The Mystical Way and the Arthurian Quest."

"Symbolically, the grail - the vessel which, in the Christian legend, contained the blood of Christ - represents the human 'heart' in the spiritual sense, seen as a spiritual receptacle. Seeing the outside of the grail corresponds therefore with reaching the Primordial State of True Man, accomplishing the lesser mysteries of classical antiquity. Seeing the inside of the grail represents the greater mysteries, experiencing the superior states represented by the Heavens, and on towards Divine Union. Of this ultimate state, the old Chinese Sages said, "words cannot describe it," and that is why the grail, especially the pre-Christian grail, is represented like a talisman having wonderful and magical properties, for there is no other way of describing the superior spiritual states than by analogies which suit the mentality of the listener or reader."

To return briefly to Alice Leighton Cleather and Basil Crump, they say that "...if the great lesson of Parsifal be Sympathy, it is by that power, and not by any intellectual process, that we shall grasp its true meaning."

There are many angles to approach a study of the grail. As I researched for this talk, I found myself in a labyrinth of words and images and decided that for this talk an exploration of the Grail itself and its meaning for us in this modern world would be the most useful. I could have gone along a variety of exciting pathways but a 45-minute talk would have not covered a tenth of one of them.

Now HPB in her article *Psychic and Noetic Action* writes:

"Verily that body, so desecrated by Materialism, and man himself, is the temple of the Holy Grail, the *Adytum* of the grandest, nay, of all the mysteries of nature in our solar nature."

To go into this is again another talk entirely, but it helps to focus the fact that the Holy Grail is something within us. Arthur Cotterell's book on Celtic Mythology tells us of these ancient cauldrons that possessed mystical powers. He says that:

"Some cauldrons, such as Dagda's, combined the magical properties of both plenty and rebirth. Similar mystery bowls or cups feature in Greek or eastern myths as holy vessels of spiritual insight. Ultimately, the early Celtic cauldrons find expression in the Arthurian Grail, which overflows with spiritual sustenance and leads the hero from death to immortality."

The seeker finds whatever he or she needs in the Grail to proceed on the Path and this reinforces the teaching in the Secret Doctrine that we proceed by self-induced and self-devised methods. The way is different for everyone and problems start when someone, usually out of a misguided enthusiasm, tries to force their opinions on others. This is as likely to happen in the Theosophical Society as anywhere else, as there are many people who are unable to rise above the intellectual teaching and mistakenly believe that to adhere to the original teachings means merely to cling to these blindly, when HPB and the Masters were constantly telling us that most, if not all, of their teachings were incommunicable in words and we would only really understand when we reached a certain stage of evolution. In a way that is another holy grail - to live the life requisite to reach this understanding, we are all grail knights trying in our own way to overcome all the obstacles to gaining that understanding

through direct experience, as Galahad is said to be the only one who could partake of the full realisation of the grail through his purity.

We need a purified intellect to truly comprehend theosophical teaching. HPB said that Jnana Yoga was the true way for the west and it is widely known in yogic teaching that the yoga of knowledge has nothing to do with book learning, but refers to *spiritual* knowledge. Still our intellectual studies are certainly stages on the journey to reach our grail and the motive is important, to be selfless.

John Matthews in his book "The Arthurian Tradition" says:

"...within the Grail is seen to reside healing for *all* the ills of creation. With its finding, or with the experience that comes to those who discover its innermost secrets, comes a release of energy, of selfless love and service, which could change the world for all time - perhaps even bring about the end of time, the rolling up of the great cosmic chart upon which the history of humanity is written-

Compare this with a few sentences from Bhavani Shankar in the 'Doctrine of the Bhagavad-Gita.'

"...whenever any particular individual reaches the highest state of spiritual culture, develops within himself all the virtues that alone entitle him to a union with *Ishvara* (the highest consciousness in the manifested universe-WG), and finally unites his soul with *Ishvara*, there is, as it were, a sort of reaction emanating from *Ishvara* for the good of humanity; and in particular cases an impulse is generated in *Ishvara* to incarnate for the good of humanity. This is the highest consummation of human aspiration and endeavour."

There is a legend that Arthur is not dead but only sleeping and will return when he is needed - surely echoes of the same teaching-

It is sad that nowadays Camelot has been reduced to a Theme Park and that the main characters in the stories are used as the names for the machines that select the lottery balls. Is nothing sacred! Also the FA Cup in football is referred to as the '*Holy Grail*' as are most goals that people set themselves. In Taoism there is a difference between the Tao with a capital 'T' and one with a small 't'. The small 't' means the way in a lesser light - such as the tao of flower arranging or painting, whereas Tao with a big 'T' is reserved for the highest

most spiritual concept that we can conceive of - perhaps the same should be applied to the Grail – to preserve its sacred character from desecration! Anyway, let's move on!

John Matthews suggests that we modern questers study the successes and failures of the grail knights in the stories, as they are really the stories of every man and woman to achieve some kind of spiritual enlightenment. He says of these seekers that they:

"...set forth, knowing nothing of the perils that awaited them; and even as word of successive failures reached their ears, they continued the search unabated, established new paths, setting out fresh way-markers for those who would follow." Later he adds:

"It is not required that those who follow the Grail today adhere to any specific creed or cult - only that they seek the general good, the healing of the barren lands." And also:

"It binds together all who are of its family and its fellowship. It is a gateway between worlds and a bridge to the Divine."

All very Theosophical stuff. Although I am trying to avoid using too many quotes, I am failing miserably as appropriate ones keep popping into my head. This one from the "Voice of the Silence" translated by FIPB reinforces the last ones from John Matthews:

"The fearless warrior, his life-blood oozing from his wide and gaping wounds, will still attack the foe, drive him from out his stronghold, vanquish him, ere he himself expires. Act then, all ye who fail and suffer, act like him; and from the stronghold of your Soul, chase all your foes away - ambition, anger, hatred e'en to the shadow of desire - when even you have failed..."

"Remember, thou that fightest for man's liberation, each failure is a success, and each sincere attempt wins its reward in time."

And from the "Light on the Path" by Mabel Collins:

1. "Stand aside in the coming baffle, and though thou fightest be not thou the warrior."

2. Look for the warrior and let him fight in thee.

3. Take his orders for battle and obey them.

4. Obey him not as though he were a General, but as though he were thyself and his spoken words were the utterance of thy secret desires; for he is thyself, yet infinitely wiser and stronger than thyself...

He is thyself, yet thou art but finite and liable to error. He is eternal and sure. He is eternal truth. When once he has entered thee and become thy warrior, he will never utterly desert thee, and at the day of the great peace, he will become one with thee."

This is allowing the Higher Self to be the guide. This is practically what the quest is about. The Knight or warrior is the quester, we need to step aside and let our inner self do the work. It is a wonderful realisation this, that we have that part of us that cannot put a foot wrong if we but trust it. But most of us can't, we try to put our faith in words, but words can always be misunderstood. Hitler got his ideas about the Aryan Race from the Secret Doctrine. Even if words are faithfully reproduced from the original, there are minds who will twist and pervert them. Words and images are dangerous always - only direct experience as a result of living the life counts for anything in the final analysis.

This is the great message of the 'Voice of the Silence' - which talks of the three halls, the physical world, the astral and the Spiritual - it is only when one reaches the spiritual level that one can be safe-

So no sooner have we resolved to find out who we are - the True man or True Woman - we have set off from the safe precincts of our castle, Camelot, and we take to strange landscapes and unusual experiences - but if we remain focused upon our goal nothing can deter us and the Warrior within will lead us through the worst trials - and these will come it is sure - we may have to face our Dwellers on the Threshold which will be different for everyone, we will have to come face to face with the worst elements of our nature which our quest brings to the surface. We will meet and slay our dragons in time and perchance out of time. Theosophy teaches that determined efforts to realise our spiritual nature will bring out the darker elements of our being which have to be faced and overcome - and these are the many trials and tribulations that the Knights of the Round Table encountered on their journey. Parsifal, when he

saw the wounded King at the Grail Castle was supposed to ask "What ails thee", but was simply overcome by the whole scenario and said nothing. Because of this he had to go back out into the world to gain more experience and develop compassion, for it is compassion that really heals the world..

The fact that one of the qualities of the Grail, as we have seen, is that it heals all ills on every level, is symbolic of the development of this quality, or the awakening of this quality, which is at the centre of all things. We also equated the Grail with the Heart, which is generally regarded as the seat of Compassion. The 'Voice of the Silence' says:

"Compassion is no attribute. It is the LAW of LAWS - eternal Harmony, Alaya's SELF; a shoreless universal essence, the light of everlasting Right, and the fitness of all things, the law of love eternal.

The more thou dost become at one with it, thy being melted into its BEING, the more thy soul unites with that which IS, the more thou wilt become COMPASSION ABSOLUTE"

Also talking about the word Kama in the Theosophical Glossary, she says it was:

"...the first conscious, *all embracing desire* for universal good, love, and for all that lives and feels, needs help and kindness, the first feeling of infinite tender compassion and mercy that arose in the consciousness of the creative ONE FORCE, as soon as it came into life and being as a ray from the ABSOLUTE."

So compassion is essential to us on our quest as well as a spirit of courage and endurance.

"Have patience as one who doth forevermore endure."

In the film "Gawain and the Green Knight", Gawain has a shield with a symbol of a pentagram inscribed on it. This is his mandala and when things get really difficult he looks at the symbol and remembers what each point represents - Loving Kindness, Compassion, Courtesy, Integrity and Openness.

This helps him through the many trials of his initiation. These are the qualities that steer him through the journey and they are attributes that we all should heed.

So let's think about our own individual journey. I called the talk "We are all Grail Knights" because the word Knight is asexual - so it can refer to men or women and we have seen from our previous meditations that the warrior spirit is all-important for the aspirant - but this is not a belligerent state of mind, but a steady focusing on the highest goal that we can individually conceive of and the determination to achieve that goal, despite the efforts of life to throw us off course. That is why anyone with a soul thrills at the adventures of the Knights of the Round Table or the exploits of heroes like Rama Krishna, Perseus, Odysseus and those connected to the mythologies of every nation, because they are the story of everyman and woman - symbolic of our own internal and external battles to realise our true Selves to find out who we are amidst the world's din - to find that Holy Grail in our very own hearts and to learn to spread its glory throughout the world. It is the effort to find the "peace that passeth all understanding" and to remain centred in that peace. Once we can do that nothing can shake us and we have the calmness and tranquillity to see and understand what endures and what passes in this world of relative truths. We can then meditate and choose what is important, what is essential - we can see that we spend money on mere baubles in the busy marketplace of the world, when what is real, the Holy Grail is free and the birthright of every living thing and something that we as human beings in the true sense of the words can access at any time if we can only learn what are the true values in life - compassion, loving kindness, openness, integrity and courtesy. These will get us through, if we equate integrity with purity and openness with innocence. We have to become as little children if we are to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but at the same time the Kingdom of Heaven must be taken by force, if by force we mean perseverance. The Masters have said that we need burning sincerity and that this is vastly superior to numbers - what wonders can be worked with sincerity and strength of mind coupled with moral courage and an unselfish motive.

This is the basis of the Spiritual Path and it is this path that we must follow when we emerge from the castle of our words and concepts and take the road that leads to the castle of the Holy Grail.

Life is a time of adventure, but all the adventures are not necessarily good ones, there is a lot of pain amidst the bright sparkles, indeed if there are any of them - for some people there is not even that consolation.

If we look back upon our lives we can see the many twists and turns in the road, mistakes that we made (or apparent mistakes) and wrong choices, but if we look deeper we see that all these are leading us onwards and ever deeper towards our own Grail, towards the Love that sustains us. Alice Leighton Cleather and Basil Crump, describing the closing moments of the opera "Parsival", write:

"A ray of light descends upon the Cup, which glows with an intense lustre, and, as Parsifal elevates it, the white Dove of the Grail, emblem of the Divine Spirit, floats down from the dome and hovers over its Messenger. Kundry, with eyes ever fixed on her redeemer, falls lifeless at his feet. Desire is dead, and the lower, deceptive, illusory powers of Nature are dispelled by the light of Truth. No grander figure was ever depicted than that of Parsifal, as he stands, the embodiment of compassionate Love, before the adoring Brotherhood; the living link between them and the fount of Divine Love whose light and power now radiate upon them from the cup he holds aloft."

This is emblematic of what we will experience when we learn to see beyond the clouds of life to the sun that shines behind it all, when we see beyond illusion to who we truly are when our masks or personalities are removed and we stand in our true nakedness before the shrine of the Holy Grail - that dimension to our being that shines perpetually despite the apparent dark moments of our lives - once we become somewhat aware of this radiance and the fact that all of life is poetry, not dull routine - unless we need it to be so, then we will begin to see ourselves in a truer Light and wonder why we ever denied the Spirit within, why we ever thought of ourselves as less than human, why we ever turned our hearts away from the beauty of another soul or the wonders that lie around us and within us from day to day. We will see each day as a new incarnation, a new beginning, a fresh chance to try to understand the mystery of life that unfolds before the enquiring mind of the Aspirant whose compass always points towards the oneness of all things, the Universal Brotherhood and Sisterhood of Humanity, regardless of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.

We go through this life, each in their own world, no-one ever really knowing how we feel deep within our heart of hearts. Occasionally someone may come along who resonates with us to a greater or lesser degree and we call this love. On a larger scale someone may resonate with the greater heart of humanity to a greater or lesser degree and become a saint, a holy man or a saviour of mankind in some way. But in most ways we live and die alone as personalities,

striving always to become nearer to those around us, trying to understand and be understood for what and who we are.

In this talk we have looked at the Grail as the Spiritual Heart, which despite our diverse routes is the same in each one of us. We are indeed Grail Knights, taking our own pathways to the Grail castle encountering our own dragons, rescuing our own maidens or knights, resisting temptation, falling victim to it more often than not, learning to be compassionate, to love, to ask the right questions to those we meet, learning to find the answers within ourselves and most importantly to realise comradeship on our journey - to know that others are going through similar experiences, the same heartbreak, the same joy, the same sadness, the same loneliness, the same ecstasy on finding truths that sustain.

Brothers and Sisters, let us continue our journey until we meet at the Castle of the Holy Grail someday.

May the Masters of Mercy speed that day on.