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**A Magical and Qabalistic Interpretation
of the Drama of Parzival**

THE CHALICE OF ECSTASY

By Frater Achad



The Qabalistic Chalice of Ecstasy

The collective tradition of mankind is endowed with a relative infallibility, and when rightly interpreted, must represent the largest truth, the most perfect beauty and the purest goodness known on earth. This transcendental truth and goodness and beauty represents the divine substratum of human nature, the ideal humanity which lies above and behind the aberrations of individuals, races and periods. It is not subjected, as are the latter, to Time and Circumstance or to the limitations from which the appearance of error, evil and deformity seem to spring.

The Legend of Parzival is not subject to Time or Circumstance; it represents a glimpse of the Eternal Reality, the Ever-

present Here and Now. The circumstances of its enactment and the place wherein the festival is beheld, need not be sought outside the Human Heart that has learned to beat in time and tune with the Soul of the World. All who are born of "Heart's Affliction" must eventually find their way to that spot where they "Scarcely move, yet swiftly seem to run" and having become one with "The Way, The Truth and The Life" they will discover that the shifting scenes of the world they had thought to be so real, will pass by them as a pageant until the Vision of the Grail Itself is presented to their pure Understanding.

It is in the hope of awakening some spark of the smouldering fire of this inner consciousness in the hearts of those who may read these lines—not having previously understood the Legend—and from that spark enkindling a great fire that will burn up the veils which hide man from Himself—from God—that I have dared to add these fragments to the great mass of Grail Literature already given to the world.

And to those who are slumbering contentedly, wrapped round with the delusion and dreams of this illusory like, I cry with *Gurnemanz*:

Hey! Ho! Wood-keepers twain!
Sleep-keepers I deem ye!
At least be moving with the morning!
Hear ye the call? Now thank the Lord
That ye are called in time to hear it.

Point I.
THE COMING OF PARZIVAL

*"By pity 'lightened
The guileless Fool—
Wait for him,
My chosen tool."*

It is not my intention to set forth the complete Argument of the Great Musical-Drama of "Parsifal" derived from the ancient legend of *Parzival* by Richard Wagner, to whom be all praise and honour.

Those who have not had the privilege of witnessing this festival-play, or even of reading a good translation of the *Libretto*, ("Parsifal Libretto" or "Parsifal Retold" by Oliver Huckel) should avail themselves of the help that a study of the latter will give them before expecting to gain a thorough grasp of the interpretation herein set forth.

I shall also suppose that the student has some slight knowledge of The Mystic Path and of The Holy Qabalah, (Q. B. L. or The Bride's Reception) although I shall endeavor to make the points dealt with as comprehensive as possible to the uninitiated enquirer who is prepared to "wake and hearken to the Call".

The Music of Wagner I cannot give you, nor shall I even attempt an interpretation of that which, in the Opera, helps so much toward the opening of those channels of consciousness whereby we may eventually receive some comprehensive of the Music of the Spheres.

Fortunately this is not entirely necessary, for the true Path leads to a point when each individual may feel *himself* to be a highly-strung musical instrument whose Will runs over the strings causing complete and harmonious vibrations in his own being, which will then seem to give forth an unformulated but delightful melody.

What is the Keynote of Parzival?

ECSTASY!

And what is Ecstasy? It has been well described by one known to us as Frater Perdurabo, and I shall quote his own words:

"There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign."

"So used some of us to sing in childhood, and we used to think of that land as far away, farther even than death that in those days seemed so far.

"But I know this now: that land is not so far as my flesh is from my bones! it is Here and Now.

"If there is one cloud in this tranquil azure, it is this thought: that conscious beings exist who are not thus infinitely happy, masters of ecstasy.

"What is the path to this immortal land? To the Oriental, meditation offers the best path. To the Western, there is no road better than ceremonial. For ecstasy is caused by the sudden combination of two ideas, just as oxygen and hydrogen unite explosively.

"But this religious ecstasy takes place in the highest centres of the human organism; it is the soul itself that is united to its God; and for this reason the rapture is more overpowering, the

joy more lasting, and the resultant energy more pure and splendid than in aught earthly.

"In ritual therefore, we seek continually to unite the mind to some pure idea by an act of will. This we do again and again, more and more passionately, with more and more determination, until at last the mind accepts the domination of the will, and *rushes of its own accord toward the desired object*. This surrender of the mind to its Lord gives the holy ecstasy we seek."

Here we have one of the most important keys to the interpretation of the Drama of Parzival, and also an indication of the result which Wagner desired to produce upon the minds of his audience.

Unless the Play is properly staged, and the parts taken by those who themselves understand at least something of the "Way of Holiness", this effect is not made upon the consciousness of the onlookers. This is doubtless one the reasons why Wagner made arrangements that this Work should only be produced at Bayreuth in a proper setting and under right conditions, for it represents the summit of his Magical Mountain of which the base was the Ring. He called it a Stage-Consecrating Festival, and its effects were intended to exert their influence upon the Drama of Life itself.

We will pass over the early part of the opening Scene with its introduction of *Gurnemanz*, *Kundry*, and *Amfortas*, and concentrate our attention on the entry of *Parzival*; heralded by the falling of a Swan brought down by his own weapon.

What is this Swan?

ECSTASY!

How do I know? Never mind, let me quote once again from one who is the Master thereof:

THE SWAN

"There is a Swan whose name is Ecstasy; it wingeth from the deserts of the North; it wingeth through the blue; it wingeth over the fields of rice; at its coming they push forth the green.

In all the Universe this Swan alone in motionless; it seems to move, as the Sun seems to move; such is the weakness of our sight.

O fool! criest thou?

Amen. Motion is relative: there is Nothing that is still.

Against this Swan I shot an arrow; the white breast poured forth blood. Men smote me; then perceiving that I was a Pure Fool, they let me pass.

Thus and not otherwise I came to the Temple of the Grail."

Thus did *Parzival* bring down Ecstasy to Earth, although the King—*Amfortas*—and his Knights had "esteemed it a happy token, when o'er the lake it circled aloft".

What is this lake? When calm and unruffled, brooded over by the Swan of Ecstasy, it is the human mind trained by the proper methods to Right Contemplation. For only when the mind is still may the Sun of the true Self be seen *reflected* in its depths. From that it is but one step to the attainment of Right Ecstasy when the Sun plunges into the depths of the Mind and the whole being is aflame with the Sacred Fire of the Holy Spirit.

Parzival had aimed high; he had hit the mark of his Aspiration, little though his action was at first understood. Yet his Folly saved him, as he in turn saved others.

When questioned as to his action he answered "I knew not 'twas wrong" although he flung away weapon, having no further use for it in that form.

What was his weapon? The Bow of Promise and the Arrow of Pure Aspiration. But he had aspired, he had hit the mark and the promise had been to a certain extent fulfilled.

The Qabalist will at once recognise the "Path of Samech or Sagittarius the Archer on the 'Tree of Life.'" This is the Path of the Arrow that cleaves the Rainbow, leading directly from Yesod—The Foundation—to Tiphareth the Sphere of the Sun, Beauty and Harmony, or the Human Heart wherein the Mysteries of the Rosy Cross and of the Holy Grail are first—if dimly—perceived.

To what other use had Parzival—son of Herat's Affliction—previously put his weapon? He had shot at all that flies. He had shot at the Eagle, the bird that fears not to gaze upon the very Sun itself.

What does this eagle mean and what does it foreshadow?

ECSTASY!

For it is written: "The Eagle is that Might of Love which is the Key of Magick, uplifting the Body and its appurtenance unto High Ecstasy upon his Wings."

This Eagle is known to Occultists as one of the Four Cherubic Beasts and he represents one of the Four Powers of the Sphinx. Likewise he is attributed by Eliphaz Levi to *Azoth*, the formula of the Alpha and Omega, the First and Last.

It was by the right use of this Might of Love that *Parzival* succeeded where others had failed. For again it is written in Li-

ber Aleph: "Consider Love. Here is a force destructive and corrupting whereby have many men been lost: witness all History. Yet without love man were not man.

"We see *Amfortas*, who yielded himself to a seduction, wounded beyond healing; *Klingsor*, who withdrew himself from a like danger, cast out forever from the Mountain of Salvation, and *Parzival* who yielded not, able to exercise the true Power of Love and thereby to perform the Miracle of Redemption."

But though we are now nearing that realm wherein "Time and Space are One" we must not allow ourselves to be rushed forward too rapidly.

There were many things that *Parzival* did not know, or which he professed not to know when questioned. He did not as yet know his True Name—the Word of His Being—though he had in the past been called by many names. Some things he knew and remembered clearly; there was one thing he desired to know and to understand.

What is the Grail!

To which *Gurnemanz* very properly replies:

I may not say:

But if to serve it thou be bidden,
Knowledge of it will not be hidden.—

And lo!—

Methinks I know thee now indeed;
No *earthly road to it doth lead*,
By no one can it be detected
Who by itself is not elected.

To which *Parzival*, without further questioning, replies:

I scarcely move,

Yet I swiftly seem to run.

And *Gurnemanz*:

My son, thou seest

Here SPACE and TIME are ONE.

Now, in truth, have we come to the beginning of the True Path which in the clear Light is one with the end thereof.

What says Blavatsky in "The Voice of the Silence"? "Bestride the Bird of Life if thou wouldst know!"

And this Bird—this Swan—so *seeming dead* until its Powers be known? Some have compared it to the Sacred Word, the Great Word AUM. For it is written: "AUM is the hieroglyph of the Eternal. A the beginning sound, U its middle and M its end, together forming a single Word or Trinity, indicating that the Real must be regarded as of this three-fold nature. Birth, Life and Death, not successive, but one."

The Illusory nature of Time and Space, which are but modes of our finite mind, has been made very clear by Sidney Klein in his excellent book "Science and the Infinite," but this is no new idea. The attainment of Ecstasy has proved to Initiates of every land that there is a state of consciousness wherein both time and space are blotted out - at least temporarily - and at the same moment the limitations of the "personal ego" no longer oppress us. In that Holy Book known as Liber LXV- Chapter II, Verses 17-25, we read:

17. Also the Holy One came upon me, and I beheld a white swan floating in the blue.

18. Between its wings I sate, and the aeons fled away.

19. Then the swan flew and dived and soared, yet no whither we went.

20. A little crazy boy that rode with me spake unto the swan and said:

21. Who art thou that doth float and fly and dive and soar in the inane? Behold, these many aeons have passed; whence camest thou? Whither wilt thou go?

22. And laughing I chide him saying: No whence! No wither!

23. The swan being silent, he answered: Then if with no goal, why this eternal journey?

24. And I laid my head against the Head of the Swan, and laughed, saying: Is there not joy ineffable in this aimless winging? Is there not weariness and impatience for who would attain to some goal?

25. And the swan was ever silent. Ah, but we floated in the infinite Abyss. Joy! Joy!

White swan bear thou ever me up between thy wings."

But there was much that Parzival must do before taking his ease thus: he had a mission to accomplish, on earth, though as yet he knew not.

By the use of these examples, we may begin to comprehend what happens next. A new "*movement without motion*" on the part of *Parzival* and *Gurnemanz* is now symbolized by the SCENERY in the Drama shifting, at first almost imperceptibly, from Left to Right. The forest—in which the First Scene had taken place—disappears; a door opens in the rocky cliffs and conceals the two; they are then seen again in sloping passages which they appear to ascend. At last they arrive at a mighty hall, which loses itself overhead in a high vaulted dome, down from which the light streams in. From the heights above the dome comes the increasing sound of chimes.

Again we may find a very direct correspondence in the Eastern Teachings as propounded by Madame Blavatsky in "The Voice of Silence." She writes: "Thou canst travel on that Path until thou hast become the Path itself."

Further in Liber CCCXXXIII by Frater Perdurabo we read:

"O thou that settest out upon the Path, false is the Phantom that thou seekest. When thou hast it thou shalt know all bitterness, thy teeth fixed in the Sodom-Apple.

Thus hast thou been lured along That Path, whose terror else had driven thee far away.

O thou that stridest upon the middle of The Path, no phantoms mock thee. For the stride's sake thou stridest.

Thus art thou lured along That Path whose fascination else had driven thee far away.

"O thou that drawest toward the End of The Path, effort is no more. Faster and faster dost thou fall; thy weariness is changed into Ineffable Rest.

For there is no Thou upon that Path: thou hast become The Way."

And each must learn to travel this Path, each must overcome his own obstacles, unmask his own illusions. Yet there is always the possibility that others may help us do this and, as in the case of *Parzival* led by *Gurnemanz* who travelled that Way before, we may be guided in the true Path and taught to avoid the many false byways that may tempt us in our search for the Temple of the Holy Grail. In fact, if our training has been right and our aspiration remains pure, we must inevitably arrive at the end of that Road; often we may seem to do so in the twinkling of an eye, and when we least expect it.

We should remember that every point of this Drama is highly symbolic. The student may place his own interpretation on that passage which opens into the Temple of the Grail. On arrival therein we cannot do better than listen to the advice of *Gurnemanz* to *Parzival*, who meanwhile stands spellbound with Wonder at what he beholds:

Now give good heed, and let me see,

If thou'rt a Fool and pure,

What wisdom thou presently canst secure.

And this WISDOM *Parzival* does in due course secure, but not until he has undergone many trials. For WISDOM is the HOLY SPEAR itself, long lost to the Knights of the Grail but eventually recovered by The Pure Fool.

Meanwhile, during the Feast of the Grail, *Parzival* stands still and spellbound like a rude clod. He sees the CUP of the Grail

uncovered, he witnesses the ceremony of the Companions of the Grail, and he attains a certain interior UNDERSTANDING which transcends knowledge. For the CUP is the UNDERSTANDING, though in this instance it was divorced from the WILL or WISDOM, the Holy Spear which alone is capable of enlightening it perfectly.

A word may now be said regarding the nature of "The Pure Fool"; and since this Ritual is one for all time, we shall go back before the Christian Era (to which the Grail Mystery is usually particularly attributed) back to Ancient China where the testimony of that Holy Sage Lao Tze gives us no uncertain clue. The Way of the Tao - Wu Wei - the accomplishment of all things by doing Nothing, is precisely similar to the "Path" we have been describing. Lao Tze says:

"The multitude of men look satisfied and pleased as if enjoying a full banquet, as if mounted on a tower in spring. I alone seem listless and still, *my desires having as yet given no indication of their presence*. I am like an infant which has not yet smiled. I look dejected and forlorn, as I had no home to go to. The multitude of men all have enough and to spare. I alone seem to have lost everything. My mind is that of a stupid man; I am in a state of chaos.

Ordinary men look bright and intelligent, while I alone seem to be benighted. They look full of discrimination, while I alone am dull and confused. I seem to be carried about as on a sea, drifting as if I had nowhere to rest. All men have their spheres of action, while I alone seem dull and incapable, like a rude borderer.

Thus I ALONE AM DIFFERENT from other men, but I value the Nursing-Mother (The Great Tao)."

So we see this Fool is not the ordinary sort of foolish and besotted person to which the form is usually applied. In his Foolishness we find his *difference* from his fellows; for in sooth it is the Divine Madness of Ecstasy which redeems from all pain. It is "That which remains" after the sorrows and shadows that pass and are done, have left our being. Then Existence is recognized to be Pure Joy. But Understanding without Wisdom is Pure Darkness, and in this state is *Parzival* discovered by *Gurnemanz* at the end of the Ceremony. This is a *darkness* even *Gurnemanz* is unable to comprehend, for he says:

Why standest thou there?

Wist thou what thou sawest?

And *Parzival*, shaking his head slightly, he continues:

Thou art then nothing but a Fool!

And pushing *Parzival* through a small door he cries angrily:
Come away, on thy road the gone
And put my rede to use:
Leave all our swans for the future alone
And seek thyself a gander, a goose.
And so it came about that *Parzival* set out alone upon his
Holy Quest.

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