

## The Holy Grail

We begin our Quest for the Holy Grail with a slight variation on the questions that Perceval asked:

*What does the secret of the Grail mean to me? Whom do I serve?*

We can study myth, legends, religion, Jungian psychology, or lose ourselves in meditation, but none of these alternatives bring us into a *direct experience* of the Grail itself. The experience can only be achieved by partaking in *our own personal quest*.

Does the Grail actually exist as an object? Is it the cup of the Last Supper? A cauldron? A stone or jewel? Is it lost? Hidden? Returned to heaven? Or just a figment of medieval imagination?

None of these matter. What does matter is the purpose of the Grail in our lives.

The Grail represents an *empty vessel* that points to Mystery itself. *Emptiness* is a significant concept here. It points to nothingness, which is the final mystery. It questions the very origins of the universe, the space within which all things exist, and life itself. Without an infinite past of cause and effect, we must assume that the universe had to be born from *nothing* at some discernable moment of time. Only there do we find our physical and spiritual roots.

But how could the universe spring from nothing? It contradicts our sense of logic.

*Silence* is the answer; *emptiness* the key.

The Grail defies logic by illustrating that its emptiness has *potential*. If a true concept of *nothing* did not include this potential, Creation would never have happened. Just as the empty cup has the potential of being filled, the universe was formed by a potential in nothingness through which the universe came forth.

It is our concept of *nothing* that is incorrect—for we have long held that *nothing*, by its very definition, has no potential.

(An interesting yet somewhat ridiculous paradox comes to mind: If original nothing includes the nullification of all potential, in nullifying itself, Creation leaps forth.)

There can be no *absolute nothing* as we tend to think of it. If *nothing* eliminated the attribute of space, what would there be? Non-space? Solid matter? No dimension? No center? No periphery? No dots for lines to connect? Nothingness without potential is unthinkable—which is verified by the fact that the universe exists. When we empty our thoughts, and listen to silence, we often find this truth existentially affirmed.

I shall not belabor the point, but merely suggest that the mystery of existence is rooted in emptiness and silence:

- the *emptiness* of the Grail, representing the possibilities of its being filled.
- the *silence* which follows our questions, summoning us to discover Truth for ourselves.

Everything is related to this emptiness, including us. Our consciousness and physical being extends from it. It is not *nothing* so much as it is *no-thing*. The ancients conjectured a non-physical *something* and called it *spirit*. They then asserted that the original source, the all-encompassing Spirit, must be God.

This attribute of original potential (creative nothingness) adds a dimension to matter (which is merely a form of energy) which escapes our understanding. It forms the basis for *conscious* experience. How else could consciousness exist? What provides that spark of self-awareness that allows us to see the world subjectively and ask vital questions? Science can map the functions of the brain and develop theories as to why we think and act the way we do—but it cannot explain that mysterious self-awareness that we associate with life.

Consciousness is that spark of awareness that differentiates us from what we view as inert matter. It precedes thought, while making awareness of thought possible. It is our pristine selves in relationship with the world we are part of.

There are moments when we are cognizant of the Mystery we are part of. We generally experience such moments with a feeling of silent awe. It has been described as a *shock of being*, a reconnection, a grand affirmation. It holds us for a while, answering questions we have yet to pose—without words. A revelation more experienced intuitively than comprehended. The perfect *yes*, where problems seem to disappear.

The bible hints at this experience with such profound words as: “I Am, that I Am” (or more correctly, “I will be, what I will be”); and “Be still, and know that I am God.” Eastern religions talk about achieving nirvana through meditation. Taoism speaks about the emptiness of Tao, which has no shape, yet sustains everything. Christianity recognizes contemplative prayer, and the value of silence and personal retreat.

It is commonly referred to as the *mystical experience*, in which we recognize the quiet through which all sound passes. We prefer sound to emptiness. It seems more real, easier to describe. And yet it is emptiness that provides the deepest mystery of all.

This is our experience of the Holy Grail.

It happens unexpectedly, without explanation, like the symbolic Grail appearing on a beam of light. We are enraptured by the sudden confrontation. Time seems to stop. The experience is very real—but quickly passes. We are left with unspoken questions and personal doubts.

People respond to the Grail experience in different ways:

- We can smile appreciatively, shrug our shoulders and move on unaffected.
- We can fear its veiled mystery, and quickly put it aside.
- We can reflect on what happened, and then tuck it away in the back of our minds.

- We can ask serious questions that will take a lifetime to understand.

The first three fall into the category of Perceval's lack of responsiveness during his first visit to the Grail Castle. The last choice is where our spiritual *journey* becomes a spiritual *Quest*. We want to confront the Mystery, the Grail, in order to see it directly. We want to be worthy of doing so. We become driven to find clues and opportunities in everything we do.

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**The Grail stories tell us** that succeeding in our quest will heal the wounded Grail King and bring the Wasteland back to life.

What does that mean?

The injured King represents manhood that is broken, impaired, separated from its own original nature. The Wasteland symbolizes the result of that separation on the world around us. We destroy the world we are part of. We hurt our loved ones, oppress women, cheat strangers, pollute the environment, and engage in unnecessary war. Most of all we hurt ourselves, leading lives without meaning and purpose.

It does not have to be that way. It is no great leap of faith to understand that we are meant to protect our loved ones, honor women as our best and natural partners, uphold justice and respect all people, live in harmony with our environment and bring peace to the world.

Lose sight of these fundamental values and all other causes, however noble, fall short.

Consider our situation today. Perpetual scandals in politics and business. Charities that can't be trusted. Religious groups almost militant in their desire to control the lives of others. Instead of working for the betterment of our world, we destroy what progressive unity is possible. And for what?

Power? Wealth? Celebrity? We hunger for all the things that will make us feel like men. Unfortunately, power, wealth and celebrity can't substitute for what we really need.

They lead to distorted perceptions of the world, illusions that result in more harm than good.

The Grail, like chivalry, calls us to life – to authentic living. It does this not so much by providing a blueprint to follow, but by inspiring us to recognize and honor the mystery of every moment. Not with words, but by implanting a desire in us to experience the Grail unconcealed—by that I mean separating *Truth* from illusion.

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**The final lesson of the Grail tells us** that proper leadership comes from someone who is unselfish and compassionate, who sees the world as it is, rather than as illusion-makers would paint it. Someone like Perceval.

Where do we find someone like that?

Just as the Grail King represents our collective wound, Perceval represents our original nature. He metaphorically becomes our humility, strength, gentleness, and correct action—when we choose to wake him.

The *Quest* for the Holy Grail, if successful, brings the Perceval inside us to life.

Unfortunately, our misguided obsession with power attracts us to leaders who are just the opposite. We elect people who play on our insecurities, who ignore true ideals and replace them with slogans and platitudes. We do not look to them for goodness or values. We look for images instead. We are politically seduced by men of power, and then suffer the consequences.

Our alternatives, of course, seem very limited. These are the kind of people who are attracted to politics. People who want power and recognition. People obsessed with image and having their names and pictures on billboards.

There is good reason for our poverty of noble leaders. We are looking at the Wasteland politics of our own making, of men (mostly) who are separated from their roots.

We have to heal the Wasteland before politics will improve. To accomplish that, we must find the Perceval inside ourselves.

We need to raise bold men of *knightly* quality who are committed to what is good and true.

We must believe in the possibility of Camelot before we can resurrect it.

As knights errant, we begin on our adventure exactly where we stand, here and now.