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## Our Search for The Holy Grail

### (Part II)

An International Grail Program 2023

### Basic Story (II)

So, this is the continuation of discussing the basic story of the Grail myth. We've just heard this excellent deconstruction of the myth, specially from the original versions and that 50-year period of 1175 to 1225. The deconstruction in the book *The Grail Legend*, by Emma Jung and Marie-Louise Von Franz. And although it gives us a version that we can apply to all of those different tellings of the story, it really doesn't give us the feeling of why this has become of mythical proportions, it doesn't tell us anything about the richness of the story and the power of the Grail myth. And that's because to do that, ultimately, we have to enter into the symbolic universe, in which this story, this basic story, unfolds. But even through what we just read, we can see that the way this telling follows, the telling of Emma Jung follows, is really very similar to what we know as the basic story of any hero, called the Hero's Journey. And it's been talked about by many scholars - Joseph Campbell here in the United States is one of the more well-known ones - but many thought about all of the elements of this Journey. In every historical literature there's always the telling of the hero's journey. The basic element of that hero's journey is that somewhere there is a call to start at. Oh, by the way, usually it's a male figure, but not only. There were also female heroes who have taken the journey, and they appear not only in legends but also you can see them in fairy tales, you find them in folk tales and even in animated cartoons at this point. When we find this, this archetype - it's called an archetype - of the hero, whether it as a male or as a female, at first there's this calling that comes to set off the hero on this Journey. The call can come from many different places and many different sources, but the hero feels the need to set out from what is known toward somewhere unknown for any number of purposes. Sometimes it's just curiosity and sometimes there's a very special mission that the hero was aware of. And in doing so, this hero travels from the world as she or he knows into the realm of what is unknown. Very often, there is this sense of having passed into some other world, almost like an underworld, the world that has never been seen or known before. In this journey, the hero inevitably receives help from mentors, from guardians, from special magical figures that give advice and consultation on the best way in which they can complete their journey. And arrive at the destination that they were imagining. Very often this involves many challenges and tests, that force the character of the hero to change in order to go on. Eventually the hero ends up going into a kind of a very dark place; a place where she or he feels lost, feels in danger in some way or feels a lack of confidence in their ability to continue. Once again helpers come, in order to move that hero along, who eventually, hopefully begins to understand what is going to be required and how, internally, there must be changes. Also, to seek out the assistance and to be open to receive the help that guides and mentors can offer along the way. Eventually this hero moves up more and more into the light and into personal transformation and ultimately comes back with the prize, with the gift of the Goddess or the Gods. So, the Grail story is just part of that species-wide intercultural paradigm for what it means to enter onto the hero's journey. With that in mind, we can think in terms of many cultures around the world that have some version of that story. We look specifically at how it's been played out in the Grail myth. And in the Grail

original text the first hero is named Parsifal. Parsifal lives in the woods, in a remote place with his mother, who has been trying to protect him from the world of knights, from the world of combat and conflict, where both her husband and her other sons have been involved and have ultimately died or disappeared. But Parsifal feels the call, he sees knights coming through the forests and feels the call to follow and to become one of them. She watches as he leaves and appears to faint, to swoon as he goes off and leaves her behind. In fact she has died from the grief of the loss of him, but he goes on not knowing that. And eventually meets with many adventures and also meets with a particular helper who helps him to know what the rules are for being a knight and what the behavior is supposed to be. Among these behaviors he's taught that it's not very good to talk much or to ask questions. This becomes a very important teaching, as Parsifal continues to pursue his call to become one of King Arthur's knights. So, as he continues this quest, he eventually comes into a devastated land where nothing will grow and they are sitting by the river, he sees the fisher king, who is also known as the wounded king, and he enters into conversation with him and this King invites him to come to the castle, what we know as the Grail Castle. Parsifal doesn't know that, all he knows is there is this King that seems to have a wound and he lives in this grand castle and he's been invited, so he goes. In the course of being there, he meets with many mysterious elements, one of which is a procession, a very strange procession, as they are eating their dinner. In this procession, you have a young man who comes carrying a bleeding lance, a spear, but it has blood dripping from it. Then you have two other young men who were holding candles, candelabras. And they are followed by a young woman holding a platter, or a plate, and then, finally, a young woman, a maiden, holding the chalice or the cup, or some object that resembles, that is not fully described. What is described about it, is that there's this light coming out of it, a light that it's even brighter than whatever the light of the candles was. And he finds all of this very intriguing and puzzling and it comes to him to ask the king: "What is this, and what is this? They told him it was called the Grail. He wanted to know what is this Grail, but he didn't ask the question. He didn't ask the questions he had about why are they holding this; where is this light coming from; and he didn't ask the question of the king: "Why is the king suffering? What is the nature of his wound? How did it happen? Is there any way that he could be made better again?" He didn't ask any of these questions. And what is this lance? What are these drops of blood coming from it? All of the strange and unusual things in this place of the underworld that he's been brought to. He had the questions but he didn't ask them. And as a result, that night he goes to sleep, wakes up and when he wakes up, the castle is empty. And he goes outside and the doors have shut on him and he tries to get back in again and he can't. Puff, it's all gone, he continues his journey out through the wasteland and he comes upon a woman, who's crying and she asks him. She knows that he's been there in the castle and she asked him, "Did you ask the questions?" and he says, "No, I didn't", and she was struck with grief and then ultimately angry at him, "If you had asked the question, all of this would have been healed." And then presents to him the information that in fact she's his cousin and that the wounded king is his uncle to whom he is related by blood, to all these people that he had been meeting. He didn't even know it, and he doesn't know how to make this better and so he's basically condemned now for years of wandering in this wasteland trying to figure out how to get back to that place. He spends time with a hermit who helps him to understand that not only he should have asked the questions, but that his mother had died. So, all this time he's been trying also to get back to his mother not knowing that she had even died and it was because of his failure to help her in his leaving. So, finally, in the end, we don't get the answer, we don't see the attainment, in Chrétien de Troyes. This is Chrétien de Troyes' telling of the story and we don't

see the end, but it is from there that all the other stories have been evolved and there are various tellings of how Parsifal eventually finds his way back to the castle, for personal transformation and enlightenment, asks the questions and the land is eventually transformed along with the king and his wound. So that then is the basic story.

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Having heard this basic story, it would be a fair question, "So why is all of this story about knights and their personal problems? How could this possibly be relevant for us as a women's movement?" And a possible answer to that comes when we look at, first of all, the characters inside the story and the symbols and the message, the ultimate message. So, first of all, let's just look at the primary symbol of the Grail, which is a cup, a chalice, a platter, a cauldron, it takes many forms, but always this rounded thing, which suggests symbolically and is understood as being symbolic of feminine, the feminine principle, this openness. Which is different, let's say, than the lance, the bleeding lance, which we can take as symbolic of the male principal inside the Grail myth. So that the myth and the procession of sacred objects is manifesting both, the male and the female principles. Interestingly, when we look at the early lectures of Father Van Ginneken, he talks about a vision of the world in which the male and the female sensibilities will come into grand new harmony. So, when we look now at the Grail myth and how both of those principles are being manifested inside of the myth in the procession of the holy objects, I find that very interesting, and the Grail cup in particular, as having the central focus. This is where the light is coming from. Because Europe of that time also, and this myth is reflecting the Earth of that time, suffered from the absence of women in the public sphere, as it always had, but it was coming to a moment when the female principle was trying to break through, the cult of the Virgin Mary began to emerge in this period. Also, Mary had not been a prominent figure at all and it was in this time, in that historical period when the Virgin Mary was suddenly taking on tremendous significance specially in the southern parts of Europe. So that is a primary way in which we can identify this rounded thing as a containment for the divine feminine. But there is not just the God, but there's the Goddess. And when we look at the female helpers for Parsifal, through his various depressions and moments of being lost and not understanding things and needing help, these are women who are either young, including the Grail Maiden herself, but also his cousin outside the castle, who instructs him. There's the mother, his own mother, but also women of that age who tried to help him by giving him advice and then there are the elders, the elder women, the crones, the hags, who come and insult him and call him a fool and tell him, and tells Parsifal when he's ready to give up of the journey, once he finds out that his mother is dead, she tells him that he's a fool and that he cannot possibly stop. That he must go on and she provokes him to continue even when he doesn't want to. So, you have basically the feminine appearing in what are traditionally her 3 forms: the maiden, the mother and the crone. These are the three aspects traditionally of the Goddess.

You also have the interesting part of Chrétien de Troyes' story which is that, from the time he finally arrives in Arthur's Court and it's becoming quite successful in his determination to become one of Arthur's knights, he keeps trying to get back to his mother. It was his search to return to the mother that brought him into the wasteland, into the encounter of the wounded king. He never set out to look for the Grail, he was trying to find his way back to his mother, not knowing that she had died already. So, it's a search to return, try to return to the divine feminine,

trying to return to the mother in the largest sense of word, that the Grail suggests as some kind of foundation for the myth.

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And now, just one other element in terms of this relationship of the myth, in a particular way with the search for the light of the feminine principle, is the feminine sensibility. Chrétien de Troyes as I said did not complete his story, but in spite of all that, not only were there continuations by other authors who gave their particular angles on it, but one thing that emerged after his death is a prequel, a prelude to his story. In some ways, like we see now, like we have Star Wars and we have the sequels, but then you also have tellings of what went on before the thing that we know so well. So, there was something called the preludes that emerged and some say this may very well have been traces of earlier versions of the story that then came connected with Chrétien de Troyes' telling. In some ways it resembles it, in some ways it contradicts it. But the part that I want to bring forward from the prelude is the telling of how the Grail was lost. That there was a time when this Grail cup was being kept by women. They lived in a communal situation, there were many of them and they were available by the roadside, offering nurturance and refreshment and healing waters to anyone who needed it, who would come by. And this was offered freely and as part of their understanding of their purpose in life. They were the other side, they were the balance, between the male principal and the female principle, between the authority of the king and the sovereignty of the Goddess and of the high priests. So, this went on for a very long time, this is the origin of the Grail Cup. But one day it happened that the king didn't particularly care for this arrangement, he didn't understand why he had to come to the women in order to drink from the waters of The Grail. So, what he did was, he raped the woman and stole her cup and gave instructions to his knights to do the same. So there, basically, there was this massive violation of the feminine, of the female, of the Woman. And the results of that was, yes, they took the Grail cup, they took it away to his castle and the land became a wasteland, it became devastated as a result of this violation, and this breaking of the wholeness of the world as they had known it. So that becomes the backdrop then, for the ways in which the Parsifal's story begins to unfold and we have a certain major theme that we can follow from that point.

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## Themes

So, this is the first part, one of the themes of the Grail. We'll start with the first one. All of the Grail stories, whether it's from Chrétien, those who followed in the Christian tradition and Wolfram Von Eschenbach in the alchemical tradition, they all begin their stories in the time of a paradise. That is a world in which all is one and each thing is operating. Each part of that world is operating in a way that contributes to the goodness of all who are a part of, so that in Chrétien's version we will see that it is preceded by this telling of the world of the women and the cups. In the Christian version, the roots of the Grail go back to Jesus, and to the Last Supper, and to the time when he was crucified but then also his resurrection. All of that is carried in this cup that then somehow manages by various means depending on which author was writing to make its way to Europe. In the alchemical version, it begins with a time in heaven when all the

Angels were together, but when God created humans, God told the angels that they would now honor and worship humans as manifestations of God's self. And Lucifer, whose name is connected to the word light, Lucifer who was the chief angel at the time, or one of them, refused to honor humans. Lucifer said, "I will honor none but you Lord." And a great battle ensued in heaven with one-third of the angels siding with Lucifer and one-third of the angels siding with the angels who were supporters of God and one-third of the angels who remained neutral. And the result of this battle is that a Lucifer and his one-third were evicted from heaven and sent away, and that's how we have hell, right, and the devil and Satan. But in the course of this battle what happened is that a stone from the crown of Lucifer was dislodged from that crown and traveled to Earth. It is that stone which became the Grail and contained within it the powers for coming into wholeness again, that's alchemy. And it suggests also what's called the Philosopher's Stone in alchemy, which is the thing that can ultimately transform base metal into gold and into immortality. There's a lot in alchemy which I can't get into, but that's the connection of the Grail in Eschenbach's version. But the important thing here for all of it is that there was a time when all was one, and by one means or another, that time was broken. And from that moment on there was healing that was needed, there was regeneration that was needed, there was the need for all of us to find our way back to the goodness of being one with all that is.

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Now the second theme is that of the journey and we have spoken about that already. How each of those who end up seeking The Grail has set out on a journey, that they didn't even realize would become the search for that thing, for that sacred presence, that object, that mystery that would bring reconciliation and would bring healing, not only to the seeker, but to the world around it. This journey, although it didn't necessarily start out searching for the Grail, ultimately becomes that. It's just a journey for its own sake, for its own purpose, for its own adventure. But in the course of that journey, Parsifal enters into the wasteland and it is that experience of the darkness, of that wasteland, devastation, that ultimately gives birth to the search for that which would heal it. So, Parsifal comes into this wasteland. In all of the versions, the wasteland is there, that happens in all of them. There is the entry to the wasteland and there he met the wounded king. Now the wounded king is never quite told where this wound came from. There are different angles on it, in all of them. And it's not exactly told what it is, it could be a wound in the thigh, could be a genital wound, which becomes interesting when we think about the ways in which we go back to that original story of the raping of the women. And that now this Grail myth tells stories about a king who is impotent. And, in that king's impotence, the land is in the devastation, where nothing will grow, where nothing can be born, where no good can come. But yet it is in this wasteland where there is this castle and this wounded king inside this castle of mystery. Where there's still something remembered and it keeps being celebrated in these mysterious processions. And the cup that still has that light coming from it. The way to release all that, somehow the key to releasing all of that again, healing, isn't asking questions. It's not in providing answers, it's not in knowing the answer, it's in asking a question, and so that becomes the next major theme. What is the meaning of a question, what is the right question. It isn't just any question. In the myth, regardless of the version there are two kinds of questions: there are two sets, one set is "why do you suffer? what ails thee," that the knight would ask this the king, "why do you suffer? what ails thee?" Those are questions based on compassion. And then there's a set of questions based in enlightenment, "What is the Grail? Whom does it serve? What's its

purpose? What is it, even?" So, there are these two paths for healing, one is in the path of compassion and another is in the path of enlightenment, and they're not opposed to each other. It's just that the myths, in its various tellings, give us these two possible paths for the reconciliation of the world. And in the course of that, when the questions failed to be answered, the hero is then ejected from the magical presence of the Grail and must then go out on a quest. The question gives birth to the quest, that is the longing now to find this Grail. And traveling through that wasteland world, trying to recover that moment, that possibility. Then, by exercising compassion and enlightenment, this devastated world can be regenerated and transformed and renewed.

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So, as we look at these main themes, there was a paradise lost, we have the journey, which leads inevitably into the wasteland, and the wasteland that inevitably gives birth to questions that need to be asked, and followed and pursued by quest. By conscious continuing the search and the journey as a quest, toward the attainment of this light, this Grail light, this Grail presence brings all things into oneness again. Even if only for a moment, but one can hope that it could last longer than just a moment, it will be constantly renewed as a cycle that keeps repeating itself. Now if we look at these things, that question becomes for us, "How can we live out these themes amongst ourselves? How can we live it out as individuals?" But for me, and more importantly, "Why do we want to explore this as a community?" It is how are these themes relevant for us in the ways in which we are together, in the ways in which in certain moments we are not together, which is also important. Also, in terms of the ways in which we are working in the world, and the ways in which we want to be part of the worlds around us. And if in pursuing these themes, we will find that they are all somehow relevant, to our work, whether it's an environmental work or social justice work, or work in relation to anti-racism or work for the empowerment of women., a work for deepening of spirituality, deepening of our connection to the Divine, among ourselves and the ways in which we do our work in the world. As we pursue these themes, we see "Yes, the Grail is on a journey and it has been since the 1920s in one part of the world or another" and inevitably all these years, all around us, we have encountered our wastelands. We have all come into them, we have come into them as a Grail community, and we've come into them as people of the Grail, working in the world, the wasteland, day by day, it seems right now is becoming even more pervasive, even more present in our everyday life. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing. And one of the questions that we as a Grail Community can be asking amongst ourselves is, "How do we learn to ask questions? What are the questions that we need to be asking as we encounter these wastelands, in the world and among ourselves? And how can we be inspired to take these questions into a quest toward even more light in the worlds around us and amongst ourselves as a spirit-filled, committed-in-the-spirit community?" And this is the value of what we believe the Grail has to offer amongst us. And ultimately, we can become co-creators of this myth, as it has always been, for a millennium already, it's been around. Almost a millennium, 1175. Well, it existed even before it was in writing, so let's just say, yes, it's been around for a millennium at least. Constantly renewing itself and taking on other forms and incorporating new elements based upon the time in which it is being experienced and being used, being deepened in. And we as the Grail, can now be co-creators of that Grail myth, and in doing that, we might get a better understanding of how, as an International Community, we can become unified. We might find there the symbols and the stories and an understanding of the spirit that

can hold us together and give us now a force that can meet an ever-darkening world. And in the course of that, we might also discover ways of symbolically enacting this myth in ritual, in ritual and in prayer, because all myths ultimately need to be enacted. And it's in ritual that the myths have always become lodged. I mean even within the Grail myth itself there's the ritual of the procession, so even the myth holds a ritual that it's remembering from some other time. And we need now to have ways that we can pray and ritualize together, that can be unifying and that we can all go together into the heart and into the arms of the spirit.

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So, in becoming co-creators now of this myth, it gives us an opportunity not to take this Western European myth and enliven and enrich it with elements, symbolic, and historic elements that resonate with it from around the world. This is an invitation now for us to have this myth be, not only as a European myth, but to have it enliven and enriched by all of these traditions and all these legends and all these symbolic elements from the cultures where we are, around the world. And in this way, we continue the journey of carrying a myth that has been around for a millennium. To carry it now into a new globalized world where it can still be relevant. And not just relevant but be inspirational, because it now is enriched with the experience of peoples from all over the globe. And for us in the Grail, who are part of this global culture, part of our own cultures, but now we are part of the making of a globalized consciousness, that we are also part of. And we want this European myth of the Grail from which we get our name, for it to reflect the cultures of all of our sisters, of all of our members, all the people who are part of us. So, we are hoping that as we pursue this now, we will be enriched and expanded and discover things that we might never have imagined before, through this process of deepening this myth together.

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