

**Advanced Core Concepts  
Independent Study Module No. 32**

**Parsifal [continued]**

At the Castle of the Grail, Amfortas is being importuned on all sides to perform the sacred rite of the Grail service, to uncover the holy chalice that the sight of it may renew the ardor of the knights and spur them on to deeds of spiritual service; but he shrinks, from fear of the pain the sight will cause him to feel. The wound in his side always starts to bleed afresh at the sight of the Grail, as the wound of remorse pains us all when we have sinned against our ideal. At last, however, he yields to the combined entreaties of his father and the knights. He performs the holy rite, though the while he suffers the most excruciating agony, and Parsifal, who stands in a corner, feels sympathetically the same pain, without realizing why, and when Gurnemanz eagerly asks him after the ceremony what he saw, he remains dumb and is thrust out of the castle by the angry, because disappointed, old knight.

The feelings and emotions unchecked by knowledge are fruitful sources of temptation. The very harmlessness and guilelessness of the aspiring soul renders it often an easy prey

to sin. It is necessary to soul growth that these temptations come in order to bring out our weak points. If we fall, we suffer as did Amfortas, but the pain evolves conscience and gives abhorrence of sin. It makes us strong against temptation. Every child is innocent because it has not been tempted, but only when we have been tempted and have remained pure, or when we have fallen, repented and reformed are we virtuous. Therefore Parsifal must be tempted.

In the second act we see Klingsor in the act of evoking Kundry, for he has spied Parsifal coming towards his castle, and he fears him more than all who have come before, because he is a fool. A worldly-wise man is easily entrapped by the snares of the flower girls, but Parsifal's guilelessness protects him, and when the flower girls cluster around him he innocently asks, "Are you flowers? You smell so sweet." Against him the superior wiles of Kundry are necessary, and though she pleads, protests and rebels, she is forced to tempt Parsifal, and to that end she appears as a woman of superb beauty, calling Parsifal by name. That name stirs in his breast memories of his childhood, his mother's love, and Kundry beckons him to her side and commences to work subtly upon his feelings by recalling to his memory visions of his mother's love and the sorrow she felt at his departure, which ended her life. Then she tells him of the other love, which may compensate him, of the love of man for woman, and at last imprints upon his lips a long, fervent and passionate kiss.

Then there was silence, deep and terrible, as if the destiny of the whole world hung in the balance at that fervent kiss, and as she holds him in her arms his face undergoes a gradual

change and becomes drawn with pain. Suddenly he springs up as if that kiss had stung his being into a new pain, the lines on his pallid face become more intense, and both hands are clasped tightly against his throbbing heart as if to stifle some awful agony — the Grail cup appears before his vision, and then Amfortas in the same dreadful agony, and at last he cries out: "Amfortas, oh, Amfortas! I know it now — the spear wound in thy side—it burns my heart, it sears my very soul. ....O grief! O misery! Anguish beyond words! The wound is bleeding here in my own side!"

Then again, in the same awful strain: "Nay, this is not the spear wound in my side, for this is fire and flame within my heart that sways my senses in delirium, the awful madness of tormenting love. ....Now do I know how all the world is stirred, tossed, convulsed and often lost in shame by the terrific passions of the heart."

Kundry again tempts him: "If this one kiss has brought you so much knowledge, how much more will be yours if you yield to my love, if only for an hour?"

But there is no hesitation now; Parsifal has awakened; he knows right from wrong, and he replies: "Eternity were lost to both of us if I yielded to you even for one short hour; but I will save you and also deliver you from the curse of passion, for the love that burns within you is only sensual, and between that and the true love of pure hearts there yawns an abyss like that between heaven and hell."

When Kundry at last must confess herself foiled she bursts out in great anger. She calls upon Klingsor to help, and he appears with the holy spear, which he hurls against Parsifal. But he is pure and harmless, so nothing can hurt him. The spear floats harmlessly above his head. He grasps it, makes the sign of the cross with it and Klingsor's castle and magic garden sink into ruins.

The third act opens on Good Friday many years after. A travel stained warrior, clad in black mail, enters the grounds of Mount Salvat, where Gurnemanz lives in a hut. He takes off his helmet and places a spear against a nearby rock and kneels down in prayer. Gurnemanz coming in with Kundry, whom he had just found asleep in a thicket, recognizes Parsifal with the holy spear and, overjoyed, welcomes him, asking whence he comes.

He had asked the same question of Parsifal's first visit and the answer had been: "I do not know." But this time it is very different, for Parsifal answers: "Through search and suffering I came." The first occasion depicts one of the glimpses the soul gets of the realities of the higher life, but the second is the conscious attainment to a higher level of spiritual activity by the man, who has developed by sorrow and suffering, and Parsifal goes on to tell how he was often sorely beset by enemies, and might have saved himself by using the spear, but refrained because it was an instrument of healing and not for hurt. The spear is the spiritual power which comes to the pure heart and life, but is only to be used for unselfish purposes; impurity and passion cause its loss, as was the case with Amfortas. Though the man who possesses it may upon

occasion use it to feed five thousand hungry people he may not turn a single stone to bread to appease his own hunger, and though he may use it to stay the blood that flows from the severed ear of a captor, he may not use it to stay the lifeblood that flows from his own side. It was ever said of such: "Others he saved; himself he could not (or would not) save."

Parsifal and Gurnemanz go into the Grail Castle, where Amfortas is being importuned to perform the sacred rite, but refuses in order to save himself the pain entailed in viewing the Holy Grail; baring his breast he implores his followers to kill him. At this moment Parsifal steps up to him and touches the wound with the lance, causing it to heal. He dethrones Amfortas, however, and takes to himself the wardership of the Holy Grail and Sacred Lance. Only those who have the most perfect unselfishness, coupled with the nicest discrimination, are fit to have the spiritual power symbolized by the spear. Amfortas would have used it to attack and hurt an enemy. Parsifal would not even use it in self-defense. Therefore he is able to heal, while Amfortas fell into the pit he had dug for Klingsor.

In the last act Kundry, who represents the physical body, says but one word: Service. She helps Parsifal, the Spirit, to attain by her perfect service. In the first act she went to sleep when Parsifal visited the Grail. At that state the Spirit cannot soar heavenward except when the body has been left asleep or dies. But in the last act Kundry, the body, goes to the Grail Castle also, for it is dedicated to the higher self, and when the Spirit as Parsifal has attained, he has reached the stage of liberation spoken of in Revelation: "Him that overcometh will I

make a pillar in the house of my God: he shall go out thence no more." Such a one will work for humanity from the higher worlds; he needs no physical body any more; he is beyond [the law of rebirth](#), and therefore Kundry dies.

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Oliver Wendell Holmes, in his beautiful poem, "The Chambered Nautilus," has embodied in verse this idea of constant progression in gradually improving vehicles, and final liberation. The nautilus builds its spiral shell in chambered sections, constantly leaving the smaller ones, which it has outgrown, for the last built.

Year after year beheld the silent toil  
That spread his lustrous coil;  
Still, as the spiral grew,  
He left the past year's dwelling for the new,  
Stole with soft step its shining archway through,  
Built up its idle door,  
Stretched in his last found home, he knew the old no more.  
Thanks for the heavenly message brought by thee,  
Child of the wandering sea,  
Cast from her lap forlorn,  
From thy dead lips a clearer note is born  
Than ever Triton blew from wreathed horn!  
While on mine ear it rings,  
Through the deep caves of thought I hear a voice that  
sings:  
Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul!  
As the swift seasons roll

Leave thy low-vaulted past,  
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,  
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,  
Till thou at length art free,  
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

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## Questions:

**[You are welcome to [e-mail](#) your answers and/or comments to us. Please be sure to include the course name and Independent Study Module number in your e-mail to us. Or, you are also welcome to use the [answer form below](#). (*Java required*)]**

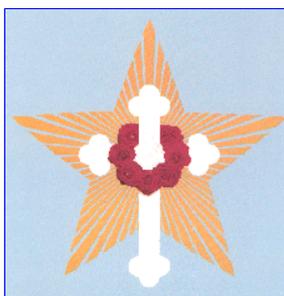
- 1.** What is the analogy in the life of the aspirant to the pain Amfortas feels when viewing the Holy Grail?
  - 2.** Why was it necessary for Parsifal to be tempted?
  - 3.** What is the significance of the fact that Klingsor could not harm Parsifal with the spear?
  - 4.** Compare the condition of Parsifal upon his first and second visits to Mount Salvat.
  - 5.** What must one develop in order to be fit to possess spiritual power?
  - 6.** How does the spirit use the body to attain?
  - 7.** Sum up your understanding of the esoteric significance of the legend of "Parsifal."
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