

**Advanced Core Concepts
Independent Study Module No. 42**

**The Ring of the Niebelung: "The Valkurie"
[continued]**

"The Valkuerie" is the name of the second part of Wagner's great musical drama, founded upon the northern myth of the Niebelungs, and the bearers of the name were children of Wotan, as were also the Walsungs.

The appropriateness of this name will be at once apparent when we understand that the mission of the Valkuerie was to go to battles whether fought between two or more, take the slain upon their horses, and carry them to Valhal. Therefore, a battle field or a place of combat was called Valplads, the place where Wotan, the god, chose the valiant ones who died fighting the battle for truth (as they saw it), to be his companions in the realm of bliss (as they conceived it). Brunhilde, the spirit of truth, was therefore chief among the Valkueries, the leader of her sisters, the other virtues. She was the favorite daughter of the god Wotan.

But when the gods had limited themselves and shut away the universality of truth by the ring of creed and dogma—

symbolized by Valhal—the Walsungs, who are truth seekers first and foremost, rebelled. They manifest under different aspects as shown by the names given them in the northern myth. The root of their name is Sieg, a German word which means victory, and it is highly appropriate, for no matter what odds are against it, truths will win in the end.

Siegmund, the courageous one, who is impelled to seek truth no matter what the consequences, may be slain as the result of his audacity. We shall hear how and why, presently. Sieglinda, his sister and later his wife, who has the same inward urge but dares not openly follow it, may die in despair. She transmits the hunger for the truth to their offspring Siegfried, he, who through victory gains peace, so that what one generation of truth seekers fails to accomplish, will eventually be achieved by their descendants, and in the end truth will triumph over creed and stand supreme.

We are taking time by the forelock when relating or hinting at events which will be unfolded in the beautiful tale before us, but we cannot refrain from iterating and reiterating that glorious thought, "For now we see through a glass darkly." Though the walls and limitations of physical existence are about us in every direction, the time is coming when "we shall see and know even as we are known."

When Siegmund, impelled by the uncontrollable desire for truth, leaves Valhal, Wotan is enraged and in order to put a check on the independent spirit of the Walsungs, he orders the marriage of Sieglinda to Hunding, who is the spirit of convention. She swoons despairingly in his arms, for she has

not the courage to leave her ancestors as her brother had done. Thus she is a fit symbol of those who, though they rebel in their innermost natures, are married to the conventions of the world and are afraid to make a radical change from the established code of the church, for fear of what people will think of them. Thus, though outraged in their innermost nature and thwarted in their holiest ambitions, they continue to bear the yoke of conventionality and go through the established church services for the sake of appearance.

In the course of time, Siegmund comes by chance to the house of Hunding and finds his sister whom at first he does not know, but when they have recognized each other, he induces her to flee with him. They both know that this act of theirs, this outrage against Hunding, the spirit of convention, will not be condoned by the gods, and to fortify themselves in the battle which they know is before them, they take with them a magical sword called Nothung. Noth is need or distress, and ung as we have already seen, means child. Thus the sword is the child of distress, the courage of despair. This sword had been buried to the hilt in Yggdrasil by no less a person than Wotan, himself, against just such an emergency as this. In order that we may thoroughly understand this beautiful symbol and the seemingly paradoxical conduct of Wotan, it will be necessary to elucidate the meaning of Yggdrasil, the World Ash, the tree of life and being, as explained in the Scandinavian mythology.

According to their concept, this wonderful tree reached from Earth to heaven. One of its roots was in the underworld with Hel, a terrible hag who ruled over those who had died of

disease and were not, therefore, qualified to dwell with Wotan in Valhal. They represent the class of people who are indolent and neglect to fight the battle of life to the last. Hel has three children, who are closely akin to her and are always fighting the gods, who have the welfare of man at heart. They are symbols of the elements which make up the material world where death alone reigns. One is the Midgaard Serpent, a prodigious monster encircling the Earth and biting its own tail: it is the ocean. The other is the wolf Fenris, which is so subtle, yet so strong, that nothing can hold him: He represents the atmosphere surrounding the Earth and the winds which cannot be controlled. Loge, with whom we have already become acquainted, is the spirit of fire, deceit, and illusion. The other root of Yggdrasil is with the Forest Giants in chaos, whence this whole universe originated. The third root is with the gods.

Under the root, which is with Hel, the Serpent, Nidhog, lies gnawing. It is the spirit of envy and malice which is subversive of good: Nid means envy, and hog to fell. Because Yggdrasil, the tree of life in manifestation, lives by love, envy and malice would fell the tree and bring it down to death and Hel. But under the root that is with the gods, is the fountain, Urd, whence the three Norns, or Fates, fetch the water of life—the spiritual impetus wherewith to water the tree and keep its leaves fresh and green. The names of these three Norns are Urd, Skuld, and Verdande. Urd is from the German, Ur, the past, primordial, or virgin state in relation to man and the universe. She spins upon her wheel the thread of fate generated by us in the past; and Skuld, a name signifying debt, is the second Norn, who represents the present. To her,

Urd delivers the thread of fate of past lives which we must expiate in this embodiment. It is then given to Verdande, the third Norn, whose name is a derivation of *werdende*, the German word for becoming. She represents the future, and when the thread of fate symbolizing the debt paid at the present time is handed to her, she breaks it off piece by piece. Thus this wonderful symbol tells just that when the causation generated in past lives has worked itself into effects in this life, the debt is cancelled for all time to come.

The northern mythology further tells us that besides these three chief Norms, there were many others, and that one officiated at each birth and took charge of the destiny of the child then born. We are also told that these Norns, or Fates, did not work according to their own will but were subject to the dictates of the invisible Orlog. The name is a corruption of the word *Ur*, meaning primordial, and log law. Thus we see the northern symbol teaches that the Norns were not subject to the gods, and that our destiny is not ruled by caprice but by an inexorable law of Nature, [the Law of Cause and Effect](#).

Under the third root, which was with the Frost Giants, was the well of Mime. The Frost Giants, or nature forces, had existed prior to the establishment of the Earth. They had helped its formation and, therefore, knew many things which were hidden from the gods. Therefore, even Wotan, the god of wisdom, was wont to go to the well of Mime to drink therefore, that he might receive a knowledge of the past. He also had to drink from the fountain of Urd that he might renew his life.

Thus we see that the Hierarchies, who help us to evolve, are themselves living to learn; and the very fact that they are learning shows their liability to err, and, also the reason why Wotan, their chief, should provide the sword, Nothung — the courage of despair — so that in an emergency those against whom he erred might have a weapon wherewith to defend themselves. Much more might be said about this wonderful World Ash, the Yggdrasil, but the student has now sufficient information to enable him to understand the relation of the sword to that which follows.

When Siegmund and Sieglinda, fortified with the magic sword —the courage of despair—leave the house of Hunding, the spirit of convention, to seek truth in the wide world, the outraged Hunding needs not the command of Wotan to pursue them with intent to kill. Wotan bids Brunhilde, the Valkuerie, to be invisibly present at the expected battle and fight for Hunding, the spirit of conventionality. But the spirit of truth cannot fight against the truth seeker, so Brunhilde sorrowfully refuses to comply with Wotan's orders. When Siegmund meets Hunding in deadly combat and is about to vanquish him, Wotan interposes his spear, and upon that the sword, Nothung, is shattered and Siegmund, defenseless, is killed by a blow from Hunding.

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Thus truth is ever upon the side of the truth seeker in his battle against the conventionalities of the church and social customs. But when the power of religion, which furnished him the courage of despair necessary to stand up for his

convictions, is pitted against the power of creed symbolized by the spear of Wotan, many an earnest soul has been vanquished, though not convinced. Siegmund may die, and Sieglinda may follow him to the grave, broken-hearted, when, assisted by Brunhilde she has given birth to Siegfried, the victor; for, as already said, the thirst for truth once felt can never be quenched until it has gained satisfaction.

In the meantime, Wotan, powerless to abandon Valhal, the ring of creed, is forced to put away from himself Brunhilde, the spirit of truth, who has disobeyed him; for it is a condition of creed that it be autocratic and brook no gainsaying. But as all religions are inherently imbued by a spirit of love and a sincere desire to benefit and uplift mankind, Wotan feels an overwhelming sorrow at the step which is necessary for the continuance of the policy he had adopted, and which he adheres to despite the heart-rending pleadings of Brunhilde. It is a terrible thing to part company with truth, and both feel this more keenly than words can express, when the poor creed-bound Wotan must perforce put Brunhilde to sleep, as he says:

"Never to be wakened, until one shall come who is more free than I."

And in that saying he discloses the principal requirement in the quest of truth. "Unless a man leave father and mother," said Christ, "He cannot become my disciple." All limitations must have been swept away before we can hope for success in the quest of truth.

[To Be Continued]

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. Through generations of Truth Seekers, what is accomplished?
 2. Who are the three children of Hel and what do they each represent in the material world?
 3. Explain the symbology of the three Norns, Urd, Skuld, and Verdande.
 4. Why must Brunhilde refuse to comply with Wotan's order to fight for Hunding?
 5. What did the birth of Siegfried, the Victor, signify?
 6. What is necessary before we can hope for success in the quest of truth?
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