

**Advanced Core Concepts
Independent Study Module No. 48**

**Tannhauser: Minstrels, Initiates of Middle Ages
[continued]**

When Tannhauser emerged from the cave of Venus one of the first sounds which greeted him was the chant of a band of pilgrims going to Rome to obtain forgiveness for their sins, and this awakened within him an overpowering sense of his own delinquency. Therefore he kneels and exclaims in deep contrition:

"Almighty, praise I give to Thee,
I pray Thee mercy show to me.
By sense of sin I am oppressed,
The load too heavy far for me.
I have no peace, can find no rest
Till pardon I receive from Thee."

While he is thus dejected and feels himself accursed, doomed to roam alone and unblessed through the world because of his unhallowed love for Venus, the minstrels come upon him, and recognizing him, endeavor to persuade him to accompany them to Wartburg, but as said before, it was the passionate love of Elizabeth that drove him thence, and he feels that he dare not approach her. As a last argument, Wolfram von Eschenbach tells

Tannhauser that Elizabeth loves him. Elizabeth has never been at the contests of song since Tannhauser left, and Wolfram von Eschenbach, one of the purest and most beautiful characters in medieval history, endeavors to secure the happiness of Elizabeth by bringing Tannhauser back to her though he himself loves her, and it breaks his own heart to do so. On hearing this, passionfires Tannhauser's soul anew, and he sings:

"Ah, dost thou smile once more upon me!
Thou radiant world that I had lost!
O sun of heaven thou dost not shun me
By stormy clouds so long o'ercrossed.
"Tis May, sweet May. Its thousand carols tender,
Rejoicing set my sorrow free.
A ray of new, unwonted splendor
Illumes my soul, O joy 'tis she!"

On meeting Tannhauser at the castle, Elizabeth tells him:

"Now the world to me is darkened.
Repose and joy from me have flown.
Since fondly to thy lays I've hearkened,
The pangs of bliss and woe I've known;
And when this land thou hadst forsaken,
My peace of heart had also fled.
No minstrel could my joy awaken,
To me their lays seem sad and dead.
In slumber oft near broken-hearted,
Awake, each pang was oft recalled;
All joy has from my life departed.
Oh tell me why I am enthralled!"

Thus Elizabeth has inspired love in the hearts of two of the minstrels, Wolfram and Tannhauser, but how different this love is will be seen from the way each handles the theme in the contest of song, which follows in the second act, where the Lord of Wartburg opens the contest with the following words:

"As oft in war times, death we braved,
And knight like battled, honor to maintain,
So, minstrels, you have fought and virtue saved.
Upheld true faith with voice and harp's sweet strain.
Tune up again; another lay indite.
Describe true love, that we may surely know;
And who so does most nobly this recite
The princess shall reward on him bestow."

In this last verse we gain a true understanding of the relative scope and mission of knighthood and minstrelsy. It was the duty of knights to follow war, to defend with the sword all who were in need thereof, to fight with a strong arm the battle of the weak. Insofar as a knight followed the code of honor then prevailing, and defended the weak, keeping faith with friend and foe, he learned the lessons of physical and, in a certain sense, of moral courage, which are so necessary for the development of the soul. Anyone who enters upon the path of spiritual attainment is also a knight of noble birth, and it behooves him to realize that he must have the same virtues which were required of knighthood, for upon the spiritual path there are also dangers and places where physical courage is required. The Spirit, for instance, cannot come to liberation without physical inconvenience. Sickness usually attends soul growth to a greater or a less extent, and it requires physical courage to endure the suffering incident to that attainment, after which we all strive, and thus sacrifice the body for the soul.

It was the mission of minstrelsy to foster this courage and to inculcate the finer virtues also. All minstrels, therefore, had that poetical strain which brings us in touch with the higher and finer things in Nature not sensed by ordinary humanity; but more than that, many among the minstrels in medieval times were Initiates themselves, or perhaps lay brothers. Therefore their words were often found to be pearls of wisdom. They were looked up to as teachers, as wise men, and were friends of the true nobility.

There were, of course, exceptions, but Tannhauser was not one of these, however. We shall find that he was really a noble soul despite his faults, and in fact we should remember that we are all Tannhausers before we become Wolframs. We all respond to Tannhauser's definition of love before we grow to Wolfram's spiritual conception as given at the contest.

Lots are drawn to see who shall begin the contest, and the name of Wolfram appears on the slip first taken from the box. He therefore commences as follows:

"Gazing around upon this fair assemblage
How does the heart expand to see the scene!
These gallant heroes, valiant, wise, and gentle,
As stately forests growing fresh and green,
And blooming by their side in sweet perfection,
I see a wreath of dames and maidens fair.
Their blended glories dazzle the beholder,
My song is mute before this vision rare.
I raise my eyes to one whose starry splendor
In this bright heaven with mild effulgence beams,
And gazing on that radiance, pure and tender
My heart is sunk in prayerful, holy dreams.
And lo, the source of all delight and power

Is then unto my listening soul revealed.
From whose unfathomed depths, all joy doth shower
The tender balm through which all grief is healed.
Oh! never may I dim its limpid waters
Nor rashly trouble them with wild desires.
I'll worship thee, kneeling, with soul devoted.
To live and die for thee my heart aspires.
I know not if these feeble words can render
What I have felt of love both true and tender."

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At the end of Wolfram's song Tannhauser starts as if from a dream. He rises and sings:

"I, too, drank from that well of pleasure;
Its waters, Wolfram, well I know;
Who that has life may dare ignore it?
Hear how its virtues I will show:
But I would not draw near its margin
Unless desire consumed my soul;
Then only would its wave refresh me,
My life and heart make new and whole.
O tide of joy, let me possess thee!
All fear and doubt before thee fly;
Let thy unfathomed raptures bless me!
For thee alone my heart beats high,
So that I own thy fiery splendor,
Let me with longing ever burn.
I tell thee, Wolfram, thus I render
What I have known of truest love.

Here we have the true description of the two extremes of love; that of Wolfram being the love of soul for soul, Tannhauser's being the love of sense. One is the love that seeks to give, the other demands possession that it may receive. This is only the beginning of the contest, of which we shall hear fully later, but these being the definitions first given by the two chief exponents of love, it is well worth noting that Wolfram von Eschenbach stands as the exponent of the new and the more beautiful love which is to supersede the primeval conception.

Even to this day, unfortunately, the ancient idea is entertained that possession is the signature of love. Those who believe in rebirths in alternate sexes, should by this fact be sufficiently convinced that, as the soul is bisexual and our bodies contain rudimentary organs belonging to the opposite sex, so it is no more than proper and just that each human being regardless of the polarity of the present garb, should have the same privileges as the other.

[To Be Continued]

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- 1.** What was the duty of the Knights of old?
- 2.** What lessons were learned by the Knights in performing their duty?

3. What virtues are necessary for any one entering upon the spiritual path of attainment?
 4. What sacrifice is made to obtain soul growth?
 5. Who and what were the Minstrels of medieval times?
 6. Why should each human being, male and female, have the same privileges?
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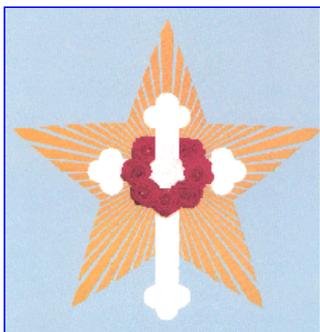
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