

**Advanced Core Concepts
Independent Study Module No. 51**

Lohengrin: The Knight of the Swan, Part I

Among the operas of Wagner there is, perhaps, none which is so universally enjoyed by the large majority of people who see it, as Lohengrin. This is probably because the story seems, on cursory examination, to be very simple and beautiful. The music is of an unusually exquisite character, which appeals to all in a manner which is not equaled by the author's other operas founded upon myths such as Parsifal, the Ring of the Niebelung, or even Tannhauser.

Although these last named productions affect people who hear them powerfully for their spiritual good (whether they are aware of the fact or not), it is nevertheless, a fact that they are not enjoyed by the majority, particularly in America, where the spirit of mysticism is not so strong as it is in Europe.

It is different with Lohengrin. Here there is a story of the time when knighthood was in flower, and although there is an embellishment of magic in the advent of Lohengrin and the swan in response to the prayer of Elsa, this is only as a pretty poetical fancy without deeper meaning. In this myth is revealed one of the supreme requirements of [Initiation](#)—faith.

Whoever has not this virtue will never attain; its possession covers a multitude of shortcomings in other directions.

The plot is briefly as follows: The heir of the Duchy of Brabant has disappeared. He is but a child, and the brother of Elsa, the heroine of the play, who is accused in the opening scene by Ortrud and Telramund, her enemies, of having done away with this young brother in order that she may obtain possession of the principality. In consequence she has been summoned before the royal court to defend herself against her accusers, but at the opening scene no knight as yet has appeared to espouse her cause and slay her traducers. Then there appears on the river a swan, upon which stands a knight, who comes up to the place where court is being held. He jumps ashore and offers to defend Elsa on condition that she marry him. To this she readily agrees, for he is no stranger; she has often seen him in her dreams and learned to love him. In the duel between the unknown knight and Telramund, the latter is thrown, but his life is magnanimously spared by the conqueror, who then claims Elsa as his bride. He had, however, made another condition; namely, that she may never ask him who he is and whence he came. As he appears so good and so noble, and as he has come in answer to her prayer, she makes no objection to this condition either, and the couple retire to the bridal chamber.

Although temporarily defeated, Ortrud and Telramund do not by any means give up their conspiracy against Elsa, and their next move is to poison her mind against her noble protector, so that she may send him away and then be again at their mercy; for they hope, eventually, themselves to secure the principality to which Elsa and her brother are the rightful heirs. With this end in view both present themselves at Elsa's door and succeed in getting a hearing. They profess to be exceedingly penitent for what they have done, and very solicitous for the welfare of Elsa. It pains

them very much, they say, that she has been taken in by someone whose name she does not even know, and who is so afraid that his identity be known that he has forbidden her, on pain of his leaving her to ask him his name.

There must be something in his life of which he is ashamed, they argue, which will not bear the light of day, else why should he wish to deny the one to whom he is willing to link his whole life, knowledge of his identity and antecedents?

By means of these arguments they arouse a doubt in Elsa's soul, and after some conversation she goes in to Lohengrin, changed. He notices the difference in her, and asks the cause. Finally she admits that she feels uncertain about him and that she would like to know his name. Thereby she has broken the condition which he has imposed upon her, and he tells her that now, having expressed a doubt in him, it will be impossible for him to remain. Neither tears nor protestations can change this resolve, so they go together to the river where Lohengrin calls his trusty swan, and when that appears he reveals his identity, saying, "I am Lohengrin, the son of Parsifal." The swan which then comes, is changed and stands before them all as the brother of Elsa. He then becomes her protector in place of the departing Lohengrin.

As said, the story of Lohengrin contains one of the most important lessons to be learned on the path of attainment. No one will ever attain Initiation till that has been learned. In order that we may properly grasp this point, let us first look at the symbol of the swan and see what is behind it and why the symbol is used. Those who have seen the opera, Parsifal, or who have read attentively the literature on the Grail, are already acquainted with the fact that swans were the emblem worn by all the Knights of the Grail.

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In the opera, itself, two swans are mentioned as preparing a healing bath for the suffering King Amfortas. Parsifal is represented as shooting one of the these swans, and a great deal of sorrow is manifested by the Knights of the Grail at this unwarranted cruelty.

[To Be Continued]

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- 1.** Why are these operas not enjoyed by the majority in America as they are in Europe?
 - 2.** What supreme requirement for Initiation is revealed in this myth?
 - 3.** What is the result of Elsa's doubt in her protector?
 - 4.** Who do Lohengrin and the Swan prove to be?
 - 5.** What was the emblem worn by all the Knights of the Grail?
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