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Holy Vessel, Holy Grail

(Continued from October Issue)

In the Vedic scriptures the one cup wherein the fiery liquid, Soma, is poured, becomes four through the craftsmanship of three perfected extraordinary beings. What is the esoteric significance of this transformation that brings out the sacred number seven? Various may be the answers. As in all esoteric matters one may offer one out of several interpretations and avoid dogmatizing. Observe in passing that the various feats of the Rbhus are achieved by the subtle power of thought directed by will:

The mighty thought powers wherewith ye
formed the chalices,
the thought by which ye drew the cow from
out the hide,
the intellect wherewith ye wrought (Indra's)
two bay steeds,
through these, O Rbhus, ye attained
divinity. (RgVeda ill. 60.2)

Theirs is a blend of devotion, speech, eloquence and intentionally directed thought. These are the characteristics of the Vedic invocation, the tremendous power of the word called *Brahman* in the RgVeda, *Brahmanaspati* being the Lord of Prayer, whose other name is Lord of Speech. Their words of power are actually given, or perhaps what is given is

a 'blind' that nevertheless bears a hidden significance:

'Most excellent are waters', thus said one of
you;

'Most excellent is the fire', thus another
said;

Another praised to many a one the
lightning;

Then did ye shape the cup, speaking the
words of power. (RgVeda 1.161.9)

Steps on the path of purification seem to be indicated here, the first step taking the candidate through the baptism of water, the cleansing waters (that play such an important role in the Vedas and later among the Buddhists as the stepping into the stream). Thereby the emotions are brought under control and the inner knowledge may come to the fore of consciousness. Then is the baptism by fire, the test of the inner life through the fire of experience, its trials and tests, and the kindling of the fire of mind that will yield the gnosis with its power. Finally comes the most mysterious of the powers, the 'secret of electricity', to use HPB'S own expression, that mysterious something that is both quickening and deadly, out of which the positive and the negative currents are born.

It may be that, hidden in these terse verses, are the four levels of consciousness which man has to unfold and experience, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual, which, through evolution, become differentiated from the one all-inclusive, integrated consciousness, or vase of vision, that characterizes the higher gods and higher men, and that in man, has its vehicle in the causal body. The latter, HPB describes as 'the luminous egg (*hiranya-garbha*) or the invisible magnetic sphere in which every man is enveloped'.²¹

This vehicle of gnosis and glass of vision is the sacred bowl that Tvastr, Nature or the aggregate of deva powers, fashioned for the gods; for it is through familiarity with matter and thereby through extracting the essence or fire of matter or experience that one attains gnosis, illumination, and is able to quaff the nectar of immortality, to become a god. No mention is made, however, of the gods 'looking' into the bowl, but the very fact that they drink Soma from it implies not only the gift of immortality since Soma calls all the generations of the gods to immortality, but of vision, knowing, illumination, of seership, eloquence and inspired utterance, for Soma is Lord of celestial vision²², the 'thousand-eyed god', 'the sun-gazer', of 'illuminated consciousness', 'whose wisdom is unattainable', the great 'inspirer of all rsis'.²³ Having drunk of this Soma one looks into the sun or heavenly light (RgVeda IX. 108.2b), one becomes sun-eyed, radiant, illumined, one finds the immortals. (RgVeda VIII.48.3)

But this unique bowl of vision had to be divided, for man, as he descended the

steps of the ladder of Creation, lost his sense of wholeness in order to experience and thus reflect clearly each of the levels or planes of existence through which he had to pass in order to learn through identification with each plane. Man's mind divided, separated, in order to assimilate, until such time as, once more whole, he could see fully and truly in the one perfect, integrated bowl of vision, his own unadulterated, all-inclusive *augoeides*, the supreme mirror of wisdom.²⁴

Vessel, chalice, or Grail, holding the nectar of life, or the holy blood of the Giver of Life as with the Christian, bestowing vision, gnosis, healing, making whole and holy, or blind and diseased should the unready or the evil-minded catch a glimpse of it; castle, temple or home of glory, emerging dream-like and magical out of the beaten tract of the forest; this numinous image of extraordinary potency has ever been the archetypal projection of that which, at this present cycle, is most sacred in ourselves, the Causal vehicle, or Egoic body, the *augoeides*, the temple of the Lord that enshrines that mysterious Presence that is one with Deity. The shimmering, translucent 'vessel' that forms our auric envelope at the highest level, the very breath of the solar angels whose nature is knowledge, love and sacrifice, stands in the background of every manifestation of the archetype of the *vessel* and therefore of the *Holy Grail* and the *Hvareno* and *Krater*.

Seen by the higher vision, the vessel of the soul is a flaming wheel of fire, poetically described as a twelve-petalled lotus, each petal being a whorl of fiery energy, of sentient deva essence, the

whole shimmering with rainbow-colour luminosity, in due time streaming out into an effulgent solar splendour. These whorls or petals, arranged in tiers of three around a central core of three most mysterious whorls hiding the Spark or jewel in the lotus, both quickening and death-dealing, the light of the Monad, are referred to as the petals of *knowledge*, of *love* and of *sacrifice*. These are descriptive of the inherent attributes of the soul; its innate *gnosis*, to be drawn out and unfolded through experience; its innate *love*, to blossom forth till it embraces the whole of creation; and its innate *sacrificial will*, the very reflection of the Monadic will-to-be, whose purpose is the revelation of the blazing jewel in the lotus, the *diamond star*. This is the great work of evolution. Knowledge, love, sacrifice, these attributes inherent to the soul find their objective counterpart in the Christian Grail legend in the qualities the Grail dispenses on its seekers: *gnosis*, the inner knowing and acting accordingly; *love*, the pure love that manifests as dedication, devotion and humility; and *sacrifice*, the self offering for the sake of Christ.

This egoic chalice or *augoeides* is the vessel into which pours the divine life, light, radiating with love, maturing through experience, shimmering with translucent beauty, dazzling all those who catch a glimpse of it in its full bloom, uplifting all those who strive for it, inspiring all those who aspire to it. This is the vessel of destiny in which is inscribed every thought and deed, either as a potency, an achievement or as a lack. Herein lies the mystery of man and the cosmos. Both are inextricably bound together for in our depths we are the

mirrors of the universe and the very substance of our soul is woven of the substance of the universe.

The microcosm reflects the macrocosm. Those faculties and attributes embedded in our deeper selves through which we know, love and will, in sacrifice, have their cosmic counterpart in those mysterious angelic beings referred to in *The Secret Doctrine* as the Lords of Knowledge, Love and Sacrifice, '*the personified sacred Fires of the most occult powers of Nature*' (SD III. p. 114). It is through the 'voluntary sacrifice of the Fiery Angels, whose nature was *Knowledge* and *Love*' (ibid. p.249) that we are self-conscious beings. This chalice of our causal vehicle, for whose unfoldment and maturity we are, each of us, responsible through our every thought and deed, whose substance is *akasha*, the very fire of those angelic beings who for our sake sacrificed themselves, is the microcosmic mirror of the vast chalice of the universe, the effulgent Cosmic Egg of the Vedas (*hiranyagarbha*) through which the divine life radiates and embraces the all._

Akasa, fiery essence which, through the breath of the Logos, at the beginning of time, is shaped into the refulgent Cosmic Egg, has inscribed on its shimmering waves every event that has been or that is to take place. The Cosmic Egg reflects all that it contains. The RgVeda expressed this in a pantheistic way in Aditi, the Great Mother of all:

Aditi is Heaven, Aditi is the midregion, Aditi is Mother and Father and Son; Aditi is all the gods, Aditi is the five races, what was born and what shall be born. (RgVeda 1.89.10) HPB herself gives us a description of this

most subtle mirror essence:

AkSsha, the Astral Light, can be defined in a few words; it is the Universal Soul, the Matrix of the Universe, the Mysterium Magnum from which all that exists is born by separation or *differentiation*. It is the cause of existence; it fills all the infinite Space, *is* Space itself, in one sense, or both its sixth and seventh principles. But as the finite in the Infinite, as regards manifestation the Light must have its shadowy side ... And as the Infinite can never be manifested, hence the finite world has to be satisfied with the *shadow alone*, which its actions draw upon humanity and which men attract and *force into activity*.²⁵

At our level murky waters—our fault! At the higher levels, the pure waves of fiery light, the ocean of fire!

This 'sea of fire', of *akasa* permeating all, being the very substance of the universe and of ourselves, our vehicles, is hinted at both in the Indian myth of the churning of the milky ocean out of which emerge, among other gems, Lakshmi—the Goddess of Fortune, the Cow of Plenty, the blazing Jewel, and the Pitcher containing the nectar of Immortality, and in the Avestan Ocean *Vouru Kasha*, the sea above, out of which emerges the Hvareno, source of kingly glory.²⁶ H.P. Blavatsky explains in a footnote in *The Secret Doctrine*:

These 'waters' are not the liquid we know, but Aether, the Fiery Waters of Space. Fohat is the 'Son of Aether' in its highest aspect, Akasha...²⁷

One who possesses the Glory, says the *Shah Namah*, can command the waters —water symbolizing the emotional level but also its much higher counterpart, the *akasha*.

Just as the atom contains locked within its heart a terrific power, constructive and

destructive, so the lotus vessel of the soul enshrines the terrific, blazing *might* of the *diamond star*, creative and death dealing. Hence its concealment, and the purity demanded of those who set out to discover it. Concerning this diamond star HPB says:

The star under which a human Entity is born ... will remain for ever its star, throughout the whole cycle of its incarnations in one Manvantara. *But this is not his astrological star*. The latter is concerned and connected with the *personality*; the former with the INDIVIDUALITY. The 'Angel' of that Star, or the Dhyani Buddha connected with it, will be either the guiding, or simply the presiding 'Angel' so to say, in every new rebirth of the Monad, which is part of his own essence though his vehicle, man, may remain for ever ignorant of this fact.⁸

To become worthy of being aware of this Star and eventually to merge with it is the whole purpose of evolution and of the tests and trials that fall to the lot of the pilgrim traveller. These trials that beset the path of return and the quest for truth, the sufferings and doubts that torment the seeker, betoken the demands made upon the quester, namely courage, perseverance, self-sacrifice, dedicated service, devotion to truth and therefore a pure heart, an iron determination *to* achieve the goal, as well as discrimination, an alert mind, aware of all the possibilities and ready to act at the appropriate time. This is where Parsifal, in the Grail Legend, on his first finding the Grail castle, fails for, although pure, humble and untrammelled by intellect, ambition or pride, he yet is still at the somewhat unconscious level where things happen, are seen, but are not correlated, not apprehended, questioned and

understood. Nevertheless, he is the *chosen one*, destined to accomplish the task.

Whom does the Grail serve? is the ritual question which the candidate should be asking when he is made to view all the wonders of the Grail procession in the castle hall. This procession is meticulously described in the poem of Wolfram von Eschenbach, as if, through a superb symbolic rendering by means of the assembling ladies, their coloured garments, their movements and positioning in numbers of seven or eight or twelve, and so on, creating figures of stars, or circles in constant motion, the poet meant to draw attention to the celestial hierarchies that, in the legend, guard the Grail, or make it descend to earth, that, in the esoteric tradition, fashion the very substance of our auric chalice. Furthermore, Parsifal catches sight through a door ajar of 'the most beautiful old man he had ever beheld' with snow white hair. But all this is lost on his intellectual faculties when first he encounters these sights. When the crucial moment comes he is unable to ask the fateful question; he is not fully 'aware' or 'awakened', but looks on as in a dream. He is found wanting in presence of mind. This reminds one of the Ancient Egyptians' insistence on conscious alertness in the beyond, on remembering one's name and the name of each of the guardians one had to pass, the name being the power. Presence of mind, alertness, concentration, had to be achieved ere one could be admitted in the presence of the high gods.

As a consequence Parsifal has to plunge back into the forest of worldliness, the morass of everyday trials, into the

swamps of doubts, loss of faith and of suffering before, tested and re-tested and thereby at last awakened, he remembers the quest and now fully 'equipped' he is capable of finding the castle anew and asks the requisite question that will heal the guardian of the Grail and bring life back to the wasteland. The 'petals of knowledge, love and sacrifice' have now sufficiently opened in his life's 'chalice' for him not only to be able to bear the sight of the Grail with impunity, but also to be elected as its next guardian.

Whom does the Grail serve? Although a seemingly insignificant question, it is yet one of those seed thoughts that the poets occasionally drop to make us pause and consider. The Grail is revealed to serve the hoary old king glimpsed by Parsifal on his first visit, that mysterious being concealed behind the maimed Fisher King, himself symbol of crippled humanity that yet has been elected to guard the holy treasure, with the hoary old king at the back of it all, unable to die until all be accomplished. He, the hoary king, is fed on the host in the Grail 'for his life nothing here is required than the host that is brought in the Grail'.

Is this a dim groping after, a dwarfing and somewhat distorted reminiscence, and yet an inkling by the Christian mind, of the hoary Watcher that stands at the very centre of our planet 'about whom legends are rife in the East' who will 'not quit his post till the last day of this life cycle ... Because he would fain show the way to that region of freedom and light, from which he is a voluntary exile himself, to every prisoner who has succeeded in liberating himself from the bonds of flesh and illusion. Because, in short, he has sacrificed himself for the sake of Mankind,

The Theosophist

though but a few elect may profit by the
Great Sacrifice.³⁰ (Concluded)

NOTES

21. *SD* V. 356 (Quest Book edn. The Esoteric Writings of Blavatsky).

22. Soma is *svarḍrs* and *svarvit*.

23. See *RgVeda* I. 44.9; IX. 22.3; 65.11; 76.4; 99.6; 96.18; 107.14 and 26; 109.8, etc.

24. Cf. St Paul, 1 Cor. 13: 'For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.'

25. *SD* IV.81; see also p. 68. fn. 2.

26. *Zend Avesta*, Farvardin Yasht, 65.

27. *SD* HI. 399; fn. 4. Cf. *Zamyad Yasht* VIII. 51 & X. 69.

28. *SD* II. 296.

29. According to one text. The versions vary.

30. *SD* I. 256.

Great brahma (Prakṛti or Nature) is My womb; in that I cast the seed and from it is the birth of all beings, O Arjuna.

Whatever forms are produced in any wombs whatsoever, O Arjuna, great brahma is their womb and I am the Father who casts the seed.

Bhagavad Gita XIV. 3, 4.