

The Sacred Quest

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A Pagan Perspective
on the Pursuit of
Happiness

by Shanddaramon



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of my long time friend and loving feline, Curley, who taught me so much about life and love and of the essence of happiness.



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The Sacred Quest

Preface



I started to write this book at a point in my life where I was not particularly happy and I wanted to understand why. I had all the basic comforts of existence but I was not able to find joy in the everyday activities of my life. I knew there was something missing but I did not know what it was. So, I began a study into the nature of happiness. One of the many things I discovered is that there are different viewpoints and philosophies on the roots and causes of happiness. Every religion has its particular perspective as do many philosophers, psychologists and, of course, the writers of those many volumes on the subject. I know that these ideas work for some and I am glad for them. I would never want to deny any truth to those who believe in it but I have found that they do not work for me. I am a practicing Pagan. This means that I do not follow the mainstream religious viewpoint of my culture. I need to understand happiness in the context of my own theological perspective. That is why I began my own study of happiness and my personal quest was born. What I discovered is that the pursuit of happiness is an honorable and worthwhile quest that each of us needs to take on for ourselves. This quest is no less grand and important than the quests of the knights of old but it is a quest that each of us needs to begin.

A book by itself does not provide happiness because I believe that happiness comes from hard work and from a deep spirituality within. A book can, however, provide what you need to begin the work of seeking happiness. The aim of this book is to provide a framework for finding happiness within the context of a Pagan theological perspective by identifying the changes you may need to make in your life to achieve your goal.



A Brief Description of the Chapters



Another thing I learned about the pursuit of happiness is that it takes a certain commitment and dedication. Finding happiness is a personal search for meaning and expression and I relate this journey to the concept of a spiritual quest. I call it the Sacred Quest because it is one that each of us must choose to take. The Sacred Quest is the knight's challenge to find the Holy Grail of Life - true happiness. (I use the term knight to mean both males and females.) Once found, the knight must then learn how to use that elixir of life from the Grail and keep it filled so that whenever the need arises, it is ready. This is no easy task but it is the greatest challenge of our lives. Each chapter of this text discusses a different part of the Sacred Quest to provide you with the means to define and follow your own path to personal happiness within the context of a Pagan view of life.

In the Introduction, you will learn about the ancient quest and its modern version. Then, you will discover the different parts of a quest which will also make up the subsequent chapters of the book.

In Chapter One, The Assembly, you will look at the call to the quest to discover what it is in us that calls us to greater happiness. You will then be given a close look at the goal by learning what happiness is. To prepare for the quest, you will learn about the basic requirements needed for the journey and you will then be asked to commit yourself to the path of true happiness.

Chapter Two, The Story, explores the story that every knight needs to begin the quest. The story of the quest provides the background for the journey that helps you to know for what you are fighting. This section will teach you about different Pagan viewpoints on happiness, ancient and modern. You will examine the basic psychological and religious perspectives on happiness which will be followed by a discussion of the ideas of two Greek philosophers Epictetus and Epicurus. This will then be followed by a discussion of

my own Neo-Pagan perspective. I do not ask that you believe in my particular perspective nor do I claim that you must embrace it in order to be happy. The Great Quest is, ultimately, a spiritual journey for each of us. I believe we must have a clear spiritual understanding of our ourselves and our world before we can attempt to reach happiness but I do not believe that we must each share the same story. It is only important that you have the one that moves your own soul. The story I know best, of course, is my own and so I use it to explain these concepts to you. I fully expect that you will adopt or use your own. Thus, this chapter discusses the concepts of my own viewpoint which are used throughout the text and you are free to follow, use, or reject these concepts as you wish.

Chapter Three, The Map, provides the map for the Great Quest. I describe what I call the Three Realms: The Upper Realm of Happiness, the Middle Realm of Contentment, and the Lower Realm of Unhappiness. These three realms, in relationship to each other, can provide a path that leads from the pitfalls and dangers of the Lower Realm to the relative peace of the Middle Realm and onto the joys of the Upper Realm. I describe the Upper Realm as being similar to a mighty mountain. In fact, I call it the Great Mountain. Each of the three realms are described in detail. This chapter also contains a discussion of the concept I call the baseline which is your basic happiness level.

Chapters Four and Five, The Enemies, describe many of the pitfalls and dangers found in the Lower Realm. Chapter Four deals with enemies from within each of us - what I call the demons. There are four main demons each of which are related to the four elements (Earth, Air, Fire, and Water) and the four parts of the self (mind, heart, soul, and body). The four demons discussed are: desire and anger, ignorance, fear, and despair. Chapter Five discusses enemies from beyond ourselves. I call these enemies the Specters. Here, too, the four main specters are related to the four elements. They are: stress, lies, conformity, and guilt.

Chapter One discusses basic requirements of the quest. These include physical, mental, and emotional tools that are required for the journey. It leaves out the most important type of tool which is the spiritual. Chapters Six and Seven, Spiritual Tools, introduce the weapons and tools of the soul that the knight will need to defeat the enemies of the Lower Realm. These are the things one needs in order

to move beyond sorrow and into joy. Chapter Six discusses the importance of seeking Spirit (the fifth element) in our lives. Incorporating Spirit into who and what we are is, I believe, the key to finding happiness. In this chapter, we will take a close look at how Spirit manifests in life and how you can find and experience it. The chapter then explains how Spirit manifests itself into the world through two complementary energies - Love and Light. These two forces are made manifest by a third energy which is Life. We experience each of these energies as part of the essence of being alive. I call the experience of Life: Being. I call the experiences of Love and Light: Belonging and Becoming, respectively. We look closely at each of these forces and how they can be harnessed and balanced in order to live more in line with the natural energies of the universe and to bring more joy into life. You will learn how to pay attention to the four parts of the self so that you can learn to provide for yourself. The forces of Being, Becoming, and Belonging are then applied to each of the four parts of the self.

Chapter Eight, The Send-Off, reviews what has been learned in the previous chapters and discusses ways in which one can apply this information. In this chapter, you will learn how to apply the weapons you have acquired in preparation for the journey and then learn how to make changes in your life based on what you have learned.

The Return is the title for Chapter Nine. This section looks at what you can do once the Sacred Quest has been completed. Most people who have learned to be happy often wish to share that joy with others and we look at how that can be done. This chapter also examines the implications of this theory of happiness for the society in which we live.



Introduction

Beginning the Quest



There is no more Romantic image than that of the fearless knight sitting on a mighty steed ready to take on a great battle. We know the stories of the knights who slay fierce dragons in order to save the kingdom or the life of a beautiful maiden. We know the tales of the knight on a holy quest who risks all to recover a magical and sacred object. We are all familiar with the story of the Knights of the Round Table who sought the Holy Grail in order to save the kingdom. We may sigh and wonder where those days have gone. Of course, we forget about the bloody wars and terrible pains that real knights inflicted upon others. Our notions of romance cause us, instead, to focus on the knights of the great tales. Some wish that they could be one of those knights - sacrificing everything for the good of others. Those knights are the great warrior heroes and, in some cases, great warrior priests of the past but there is a quest that each of us in modern times needs to take on. It is the sacred quest for the secret of happiness.

Although the days of shining armor and lances may be over, the chance to take on the Sacred Quest is not. There is another Holy Grail that each of us must pursue and doing so requires the same amount of commitment, courage, and strength as was required of those knights of old. This Holy Grail is something we all possess but which requires a Sacred Quest to uncover and behold, for within the Grail is the elixir of happiness. Finding this drop of joy can help us lead happy and fulfilled lives. This is the objective of the Sacred Quest and of the spiritual life - true happiness. It is the philosopher's stone; it is the ring of power. Seeking happiness is like taking on a great personal quest and it may be the single most important battle you fight in your life. True lasting happiness is elusive in the lives of most people. To find it requires traveling great distances in the mind. It requires slaying terrible beasts and taking on difficult challenges. It includes seeking the beautiful that is waiting to be rescued and then returning home to the kingdom to help others. This is the Sacred

Quest for us today.

Every sacred quest has several parts that need to be experienced and fulfilled in order to assure success. Those who jump into a journey without any preparation or instruction are more likely to fail. Before setting out on a trip, you need to know where you are going and how to get there. You need to know what to take and you will want to know as much as you can about what you may encounter. Every quest has its essential elements and this one is no different.

Essential Parts of the Quest

1. The Assembly
2. The Story
3. The Map
4. A Description of the Enemies
5. Gaining and Using Tools or Weapons
6. The Send Off
7. The Return

Each part of the quest is important and helps to make sure that the quest will be successful. First, the knights must be sought out and brought together. This is the Assembly. A call is issued throughout the land for the best and the bravest. Once they have been brought together, they are told what the goal of the quest shall be and are tested to be sure they have what it takes to succeed. Those that remain swear their allegiance to the to the purpose and completion of their quest. The knights are then told the story of how their quest came to be and why it is important. In the name of the gods of their land they are reminded of the spiritual importance of their journey. Next, they are given the maps to the lands in which they must travel. The knights all know that the map will be incomplete for no one knows all the treacherous secrets of every land but they know that the map will provide them with much needed information and guidance. There will also come a description of the enemies they may encounter along the way. This information may also be incomplete but any news about the enemy is welcome. The knights are given their weapons and tools and

are instructed in their use. Many of these tools will be powerful weapons but some will also be tools for the mind, the heart, and the soul for the knight will need everything she can use to succeed. When the training has been completed, the knights are given a grand send-off as they make their way toward their pathway. When they have finished, those who have succeeded will return and teach the others about what they have learned.

These are the same requirements you will need for your quest. Because you are reading this book you have, in effect, already started on the quest. You have heard the call that your soul has put out. You know the goal of your quest. In this book you will be given a story and a map to help you find your way in your quest for happiness. You will be given a description of the enemies you may face in your path and you will be given a set of weapons and tools to help you defeat those enemies. Then you will be ready to take on the quest and you can return to the village to help others begin their quest.

Basic Terms and Concepts

This book is not an introductory text on Paganism. There are already many excellent works on this topic and it is highly recommended that readers be familiar with these basic texts if they are not already knowledgeable about basic Pagan concepts. I do, however, wish to introduce some terms that are important to understand in reading this work. The primary concepts that are used throughout this book are the elementals and the equilateral cross.

I believe that the entire universe is composed of a consciousness. This consciousness is not to be understood in an anthropomorphic sense. It is not a human consciousness. It is a universal energy source that exists as a state of pure awareness which is difficult concept for us to grasp. I call this universal consciousness and cosmic source of energy - Spirit. This all pervading consciousness is in constant flux. It exists in an eternal state of impermanence. We experience this constant change in our lives through different energies. Matter is a form of energy that exists in much slower vibration but because we often do not see matter as changing. We perceive energy as existing in different states of being: matter and energy. If we consider further the transitions from matter

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to energy we may perceive four states: matter, matter becoming energy, energy, and energy becoming matter. Pagans use the Classical four elements first introduced by ancient Greek philosophers to represent these states. These elementals are: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. Earth represents matter, grounding, and the material. Air represents matter transforming to energy which we experience through thought and communication. Fire is the metaphor for pure energy which we experience as the energy of life while Water represents the transition from energy to matter which we experience in dreams and meditative states. These four elementals are often viewed in terms of a circle to illustrate the cyclic nature of their existence.

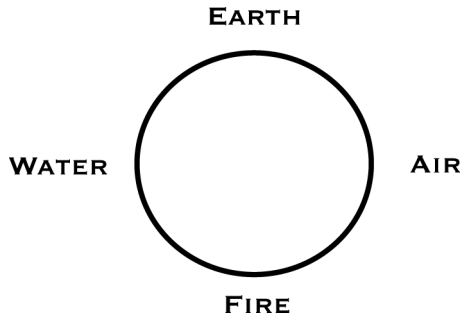


Illustration 1: The Elements

Another way to view these elements is in terms of an equilateral cross. A fifth element - Spirit - is added to the middle. Spirit is the universal consciousness which centers and holds the other four elements together. It is the source for all other energies.

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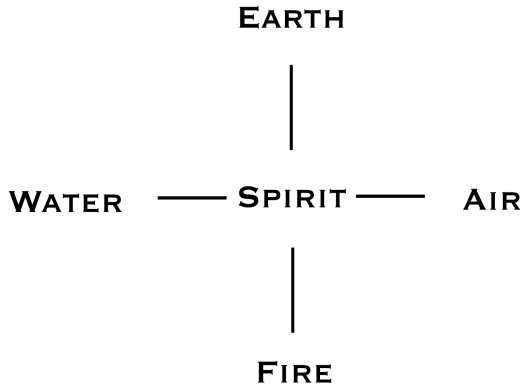


Illustration 2: The Equilateral Cross

These five elements correspond to many different things and relationships. The equilateral cross and circle of the elementals provide important maps to understanding ourselves and the universe. Since we will be dealing primarily with the self, we need to look at the relationship of the five elementals to the parts of the self. Each elemental represents a part of what makes us who we are. Earth represents the body and Air represents the mind and thoughts while Fire represents the emotional side and Water represents the soul. Spirit is nothing less than Spirit for that is a part of all of us as well. We experience Spirit primarily through our own soul but it is expressed in everything we are. Our individual experiences and expressions of Spirit are revealed through our emotions and our thoughts which are made manifest through the temporary vessel known as the body. By understanding these relationships and integrating them together do we find wholeness and, as we shall see, happiness.

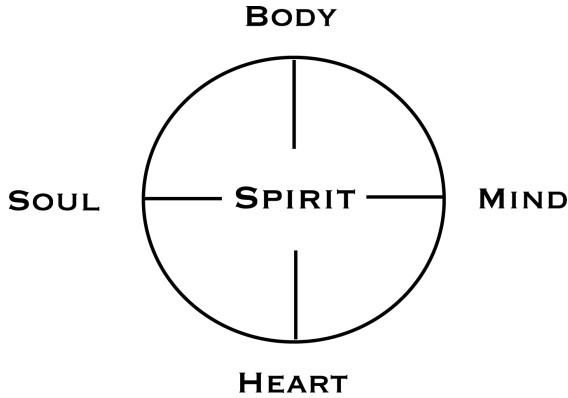


Illustration 3: The Elemental Circle

The Five Parts of the Self

Just as these elements represent forces in the universe that combine to create all that we know, the five elements of the self are what constitutes the parts of each of us that combine to create a whole person. By paying attention to each of these areas and seeing how they interact with each other, we come to better understand ourselves. Understanding and knowing how to make decisions based on that knowledge is wisdom and wisdom is an important factor in creating a life of happiness.

Prelude

Once upon a time there was a mysterious land ruled by a great queen. For many years, the people of the land lived in peace and harmony. Their Queen was kind and just and she made it possible for the them to prosper. But then, the winds of fortune changed and the people fell on hard times. It began when the rains did not come. The land began to dry and the crops withered. People became hungry and thirsty and sickness spread. In desperation, the mighty Queen assembled her priests to consult the gods as to why this was happening. The priests did as they were told. One priest was struck with a vision: to save the land, the people must find something special

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and unique. In the vision, the priest saw the image of a magic cup that would hold unlimited amounts of a magical liquid - the Holy Grail. The Grail was seen to be placed upon a high mountain in a distant mysterious land. Because of this vision, the priest believed that if the people could find and possess this great and sacred object, their troubles would be over. The priest with the vision told his fellow clergy. The priests then went to the Queen and reported their findings. The Queen immediately put out a call across the land. The strong and the brave were summoned to duty to serve the people. Men and women from all the local villages came to the Queen's court to take on the challenge. They would become knights and seek the Holy Grail. When they all arrived, the Queen assembled them together and told them they were needed for a very important quest. She then put them each through a test to determine their ability to succeed. The Queen selected a few of the best and bestowed upon them the honor of knighthood on behalf of the people. These stalwart men and women began their preparation for the quest they were about to embark upon. They were told the story of the vision of the priest and what the Holy Grail meant to the people of the land. They were given a map of the land they would have to explore and of the mighty mountain which held the magic cup. They were told about the many strange and mysterious beasts they might encounter along the way - creatures determined to keep them from succeeding in their goal. Next, they were given their weapons and taught how to use them. Finally, the knights were ready to begin the long arduous journey to save their people. Well-wishers from all over the countryside lined the path from the Queen's court to the dark trail leading away from their land. They stood and waved to the great knights as they passed by upon their mighty horses. With pride and hope, these men and women rode off in the direction of their quest. They each knew they had to succeed if their people and their country were to be lifted from the depths of despair. Off they ventured into the dark woods until the villagers could no longer see their bright banners and shining armor. Each knight held in his or her heart hope for success for they knew the life of the countryside was dependent upon it. This is the story of their sacred quest which is also the story of yours.