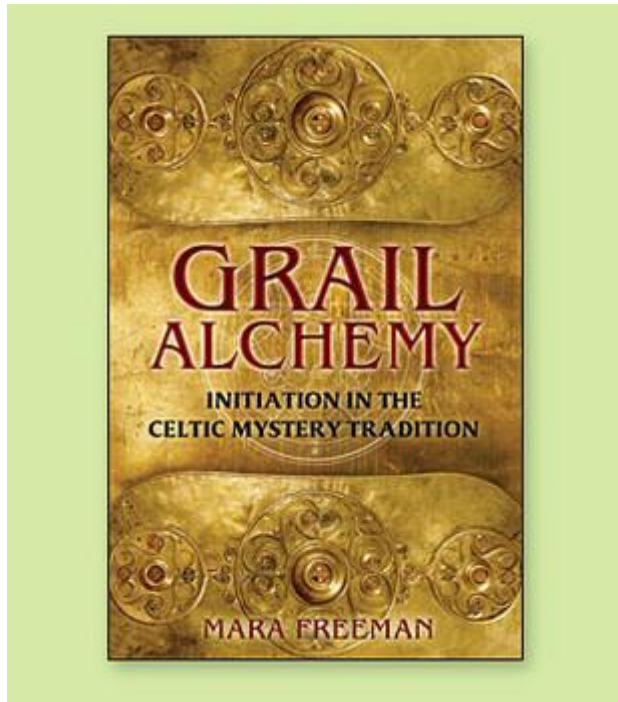


Mara Freeman on 'Grail Alchemy Initiation in the Celtic Mystery Tradition'



Grail Alchemy Initiation in the Celtic Mystery Traditions

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1. What was your main intention knowledge and wisdom wise in creating your book "Grail Alchemy Initiation in the Celtic Mystery Tradition?"

I've been teaching the magical tradition of the Grail for almost 20 years now, both in the US and in Glastonbury, England, which many believe was the original Isle of Avalon. So Grail Alchemy really grew out of that whole cycle of magical work. One reason I wrote the book was to show why, hundreds of years after the first stories were told, we still find the quest for the Grail showing up in books, movies, TV series, and even computer games. Joseph Campbell called it "the founding myth of Western civilisation." I think of it as the recurring dream in our collective psyche which we must bring fully to consciousness so that its message can be understood and worked through. The book is intended to explore what this myth has been trying to tell us – and how it can change our world if we take its message on board. It's also designed to offer a spiritual path grounded in the esoteric traditions of Britain, particularly the Mysteries of the Goddess, the Grail and the Sword.

2. I collect tarots and oracles and specially love the Arthurian ones. What is it about these stories that continually fascinate us even to this modern day?

I think it's because these stories and images don't simply come from the imagination of a single individual but spring from a world we might think of as "the Inner West." The Arthurian myths and legends are rich with power and meaning precisely because they are the flip side of our outer world, the dark side of our moon. There's a part in all of us that has nothing to do with the current post-industrial world, that longs for the magic of Merlin, the mystery of the Lady of the Lake, that thrills to the hidden dangers of the Old Forest, and feels at home in Camelot.

The other reason the Arthuriad exerts such a magnetic pull on us today is because the story ultimately ends in tragedy: the Grail is withdrawn from the world and Arthur's golden age dissolves into civil war. As Grail Alchemy shows, the fatal flaws that caused chaos in Camelot are what's behind the violence and destructiveness of our world today.

3. So do you think the actual Grail ever existed? Or is it pretty much metaphysical at this point?

The Grail has always existed as a powerful living archetype on the inner planes. It's not surprising that it shows up in all sorts of ways in the physical world too. Every now and then some one somewhere claims to have found the "real" Grail. There's the sacro catino, a hexagonal green bowl in the cathedral of Genoa, thought to be made of emerald until it turned out to be glass. Another is the agate bowl known as the Holy Chalice of Valencia, which came from Palestine or Egypt, dated as contemporary with the Last Supper. There is also the exquisitely decorated 6th century Antioch Chalice, recently identified as either a Eucharistic chalice or lamp bowl. Some claim the Grail does exist but has never been found. It may have been the legendary treasure concealed by the Cathars in the castle of Montségur in southern France during the Inquisition, or else hidden away by Templar knights in Rosslyn Chapel, Edinburgh. In my book, I tell the story of the Glastonbury Grail that caused a national sensation in the early 20th century. It's a fascinating story, all the more so because many people still continue to have quite profound psychic experiences in its presence.

4. What would you like to share with us about the Celtic Mystery Tradition from your book with us?

In Grail Alchemy I trace the primary Celtic myth of initiation which has its roots in the goddess and her sacred vessel: cup, vat, or cauldron, which contains an elixir of potent magical power. These stories encode ancient rites of initiation from the Celtic era and earlier, which were probably very similar to the Eleusinian mysteries of Greece. Later stories describe how male warriors attempt to steal the vessel from the women who guard it, and so it is removed from the world. That's the beginning of all the later stories of the Grail being secreted away in a hidden castle. The bards brought the story to the courts of France and Europe where it morphed into the tales of knights questing for a magical vessel that will heal all ills. At some point, the Celtic tales got interwoven with the story of the Cup of Christ, but that was a later addition by Christian scribes.

5. I am curious with your background, what your perspective on Merlin is when it comes to the Grail Arthurian Tales?

There are so many aspects to Merlin. In the earliest records, it's clear that he is far removed from the old man with the white beard and pointy hat from the cartoons. Originally he was probably a god, or at least, one of the primary Guardians of Britain, one of the "gods who made the gods." His original name

was Myrddin and an old Welsh poem tells us that Britain was once called Clas Myrddin, Merlin's Castle. But of course Merlin is most well-known for his role in the Arthurian saga where he really pulls the strings at all the significant events in the king's reign like securing Arthur's sword from the Lady of the Lake, creating the Round Table and even organizing the quest of the Grail according to some versions. There's also an esoteric theory about Merlin that I believe came through the visions of Dion Fortune, the well-known 20th century occultist: She reckoned he was a priest of Atlantis who survived the great flood which destroyed it. He sailed to Britain, which was an Atlantean colony, and tried to establish the sophisticated culture, science and religion of the drowned continent among the primitive people of the British Isles and Ireland. Memories of this lingered in local folk memory for centuries afterwards, giving rise to the legend that Merlin built Stonehenge. The story of how Merlin's spells got Uther Pendragon to mate with the Cornish princess Igraine was pure Atlantean magic, or as we would say today, genetic engineering! Igraine was of the 'Sacred Clan,' descended from a royal line of Atlantean princesses while Uther was of the hardiest Celtic stock: Merlin was experimenting with the Atlantean practice of breeding a king who would embody the finest qualities of both races, so the glory that was Atlantis would continue in this new land.

6. Would you share a story with us regarding the Grail that isn't as known as the Arthurian tale?

Because I live in mid-Wales, I like to visit the ruins of a medieval abbey called Strata Florida that's just a few miles from where I live. It has its own Grail legend: When Henry VIII's men came to knock down Glastonbury Abbey, seven monks supposedly fled westwards into Wales under cover of night bearing with them their most prized treasure – the Holy Grail – which had been brought to England by Joseph of Arimathea. When Strata Florida was also destroyed, the cup fell into the hands of a local family who lived at nearby Nanteos Mansion. The Nanteos Cup, as it came to be called, was made from olive wood, and many who drank from it were miraculously healed. As its fame grew, many pilgrims came from miles around to drink from it, but unfortunately some nibbled bits out of it to take home with them so there's not much left of it today!

7. How would one go about a personal Grail quest themselves starting in their daily lives?

Well, they need to read the book which gives clear instructions for going about this! In a nutshell, the Grail lies within the heart of each of us, although it can be as elusive as the one hidden in the Grail Castle. In this context, it is the vessel of the soul upturned to receive the downpouring influence of Spirit. When that connection is made and developed on a regular basis, we each become a Grail Bearer, one who can receive the Light of the Grail for blessing and healing ourselves and others.

8. Could you share some thoughts on the divine feminine and restoring it with us?

The quest for the Grail is a search for the lost power of the feminine. One story tells how there used to be maidens living at the sacred springs in the forest, each bearing a golden cup. An evil king and his men raped them and stole their cups, after which the land became a blighted and barren wasteland, and the Grail was withdrawn from the world. The maidens are aspects of the Soul of the World, the Anima Mundi, who has always been conceived of as feminine. It's a perfect allegory for our own times too, showing how the personal is really the political, and the violation done to the Feminine is linked to the

rape of the Earth. As the Soul of the World is feminine, so is the individual soul within each of us, so that to seek the Grail is to go in quest of the essential Self which has been devalued and disregarded in a world that values the material over the spiritual.

9. Where does the Fisher King fit into all this with us? I love the Terry Gilliam movie with Jeff Bridges and Robin Williams and the story a whole lot.

Only the most worthy knight in Arthur's court can attain the Grail, and this depends on him passing a test which involves asking a ritual question at the castle of the Fisher King or Rich Fisherman. This mysterious character personifies our woundedness within the Wastelands we have created within ourselves and on our planet. In some versions of the Grail legend, we learn that he has been deeply wounded with a terrible injury that will never heal. For the masculine principle suffers equally with the feminine when these two forces are out of balance. His wound is also expressed in sexual terms: He has been struck in the thighs – a euphemism for the genitals – and has been rendered impotent and sterile. His sorry state is reflected in the barren lands that lie all about him, where the trees bear no fruit, the crops fail, and the women bear no children. The Fisher King himself is representative of the male principle made impotent and infertile due to the severed relationship with the Earth and the Feminine. So the Grail stories also teach us about the need to heal the split between masculine and feminine, Heaven and Earth, Ego and Spirit, that has plagued Western civilization for so long. They give voice to the collective unconscious of the Western psyche which knows that we have lost a priceless spiritual treasure. That this story never dies and is still as alive today is testimony that the Grail has never really been found: We must continue to seek the Grail in order to reclaim the Western soul, heal the Wasteland we have made of modern life

10. What is next when it comes to your projects and any links you'd like to share with us?

There are three major projects in my life in the next few years. I'll be continuing to take groups to Glastonbury and other sacred sites in England to visit places associated with the Arthurian and Grail legends. There will be other trips planned too related to these and similar themes – a retreat in Ireland and a journey through Wales. You can find out more at www.celticspiritjourneys.com I'm also pretty busy with the Avalon Mystery School which offers a three-year training program in the Arts of Sacred Magic as a correspondence course. This year I'm also teaching it as a live class series online, and it's proving a lot of fun having personal interaction with people from all over the world. You can find out more at <http://chalicecentre.net/avalon-mystery-school.html>. And I'm in the beginning stages of a new book too, so there's a lot going on!