

Knighly Virtues

A Digest of online discussion regarding Knightly Values from the Ynys Fawr
Email List

Hi all,

I noted recently that we hadn't really had any discussions on medieval topics on the list in a long time so I thought I'd fire one off for people's considerations.

This has all stemmed from several discussions about chivalry and knightly virtues that I have had with several members of the populace. So I wanted to find out what chivalry means to different people? and also what "knightly" virtues people think should be promoted in the society?

For me chivalry fits very close the Arthurian ideals that we use in the society (unfortunately I have struggled with these on many occasions). I strongly believe that chivalry is very closely tied to courtesy, I have seen many argument on internet forums that argue that one can be the height of chivalry while not be courteous and vice versa. In a discussion that I had with several members of the group Clovis made what I think was a very good statement, he said something to the effect of (hopefully he will clarify if I have note gotten this quite right) - In our group courtesy gains the respect that one would have been afforded from the title that they may have been given in period -.

What do others think?

Daniel Russell

Milord Wulfgar and the populace of Ynys Fawr,

Interesting questions ... what does chivalry mean to me and, what "knightly" virtues should we promote in the society.

To me, chivalry means having and exhibiting the courage to do the "right" and "good" thing irrespective of the possible harm that may be caused to the person, property or honour of the individual. This is best demonstrated in the medieval tales of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and The Neiblungenlied. In both tales, the hero(ine)s were faced with moral and ethical dilemmas where there was an easy (but wrong) solution and a difficult (but right) solution to the problem. In these tales, the hero(ine)s had the courage to choose the good and ethical path whilst others around them chose the bad and unethical path (or had the alternative demonstrated to them).

In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the wife of the Green Knight daily tempted Sir Gawain while the Green Knight was out hunting. When Sir

Gawain was held to account, he told the truth despite the fact that he was in fear of his life.

In The Neiblungenlied, Katerine (I think) killed the murderer of her husband (Sigmund) despite the fact that she knew that her own life would be forfeit because, according to the tale, women are not allowed to kill men under ANY circumstances.

This also means cleaving to a personal moral standard irrespective of the common moral standard. It means placing yourself in harms way to protect someone or something that is, in the circumstances, defenceless. This protection extends to the person, their property and their honour. So, in effect, courtesy IS chivalric conduct because it is a protection of the honour and decency of others above your own.

What virtues ought the society promote? I think that it already promotes virtue. I find the society at large to promote community and courtesy ... what more do you want?

Cheers
Fr. Juan
(FTBATSOA)

Hi all

I believe Chivalry to be a way of life beyond the SCA. As, in real life, I would help a stranger in distress at the risk of my own life. This was most poignantly shown last week with the Melbourne lawyer (I can't remember his name isn't that terrible) giving his life to help a lady in distress.

This to me is a way of life as I could not ever not step in when a helpless person needed help. I agree totally with Milord Juan that Chivalry is a moral code of conduct deriving from courtesy and compassion. Milady Min is also correct and was very eloquent in her testimonial.

I also have grown up reading books about Knights and their ways. I am a Tolkien tragic and have been reading it since I was 8 - and to me the concept of giving your all or your life, for those you do not even know, has been ingrained in my being for over 30 years.

Courtesy and compassion should be something we all strive for in all aspects of our lives not just the SCA. I do not mean to preach just to espouse a general hope for all the world.

The creed I live my life to is the only thing I found out of the bible to be relevant to me and my life: Do to others as you would have done to you. I myself feel that this is the basis for my understanding of Chivalry and Knightly Virtues.

Arianwen Gwenhwyvar
(Pip)

Within our Society we create for ourselves a comfortable way of learning to be chivalric and courteous unto others. It's a great group when you can walk up to someone and complement them without them thinking you want something of them.

The benefit of this is not necessarily within the group but when we can bring these virtues into the mundane world where some may consider it much needed.

Just yesterday I referred to a work colleague as a lady. She blushed and was quite surprised by the comment. I didn't even think about what I was saying as it left my mouth.

This reminds me of the old joke:

You know your in the SCA when:
You curtsy to the bride as she passes by at a wedding.

Philip de Ravenshagh

Greetings all.

As I read these responses on the Knightly virtues, I am gladdened that there is enough belief in them that the culture of the Barony may benefit.

Thank you Dan for opening up the discussion amongst those on the List. I would ask the List members, don't forget to chat about these things amongst those who do not have access to this List, and Ynys Fawr will be richer for it.

Perhaps I can add something, that is easy to remember, and was taught to us when we started the SCA in Australia (Rowany), and something I try to live my whole life by;

"Treat your lessers as your equals. Treat your equals as your betters. Treat your betters with the respect that their position represents and deserves."

This is the groundwork for behaviour in Court at events too.

Also, particularly for weapons societies, and for us in Tournament; "An armed Society is a polite Society."

As a Peer, I agree with Kareina's points about Prowess etc. I believe that all the Peerages have all those qualities mentioned, as much in good measure as applicable, each within their field of endeavour.

The oath is oddly special and prosaic. The first time I swore it, it was with my hands laid in the hands of King William and Queen Joanne. Very personal. The second time, was on the Great Sword of State, unsheathed, as would a Knight. Both significant and special, however I felt the sword to be more powerful and representative of the ideals in a purer form. As for the meaning of the words, it changes, but the Oath's Tolkein origins remind me of the nature of what we do; that this is grounded in the idea of making a world of heroes and legends, and you can't have those without ideals of chivalry, sacrifice and courage.

Some people find it all a bit too complex, just taking the sport or the organisation or the artistry for its own sake. For them that do, I feel they miss out on something more majestic, but we must respect each person's embrace of the Society for what it is, and can do no more than offer further insights.

So keep up the discussion beyond the List, if you can.

Maddie

Good topic. Good discussions. Many words for a simple concept, best summed up, I believe, by a line in the movie "Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure": Be excellent to each other.

Rob & Lucy

Good Gentles

After the discussion on Chivalry and Knightly virtues on this list, I was tempted to go out and search around and see what I could find on the subject. and I found this site which I found rather interesting

<http://www.astro.umd.edu/~marshall/chivalry.html>

I hope some of you find is helpful as a starting point or something to further your ideas with.

YIS
-Trisola

More thoughts gathered after looking around

There have been lots of treatises on what they called the Knightly Virtues through the Middle Ages. Composed either by Knights themselves or philosophers, but its rare that you will find any two exactly alike. However as you go through them there are several themes that tend to run through them all

Courage: Not the courage we associate with bravado, but rather a courage of the Heart to do what is right, or difficult. To undertake things that are seen as unglamorous or unpleasant. Even the courage to say you were wrong when you have been.

Justice: Holding yourself the highest standard of behaviour. And realizing that fudging of even the smallest of rules, while it may be expedient, is in itself weakening to ones character

Mercy: words and actions are powerful weapons. You can use them to wound, if not in body but in spirit. Something I am sadly aware I am sometimes deficient in at times when the humors take me. Try to foster a better community spirit by avoiding hostility and promoting tolerance of other peoples ideas and opinions.

Generosity: Is a theme that's always played a big part. Charity was considered important Alms were given out to the poor. But it also means more than that. Not just sharing the wealth but also sharing other valuable things, Our time, our patience, our friendship, Share the Wisdom if it is sought or advice if its needed or even a shoulder to cry on when things don't work out the way someone planned. You don't have to be wealthy to be generous and you don't have to be rich to be wealthy

Faith: Could mean many things. I'm not overly religious so I choose to interpret this as having faith in myself and in others and being someone people can put faith in to do something or to keep my promises.

Nobility: Not just attainment. Just because you don't have a pointy hat doesn't mean that you cannot be noble. Nobility in ideal or nobility of conviction are just as, if not more important that any outward sign. I king may be considered noble and due all respect, but if all he does is criticize or make bad decisions based on his own desires, is he really more noble than the untitled lord who acts with a true nobility in both word and deed?

Hope: A positive outlook and cheerful demeanour. Hope isn't just a safety net its something that can shield us and inspire others at the same time. Without hope we wouldn't be trying to be Knightly at all!

These are just seven points but they are the common themes I've found. I hope that this helps.

Yis
-Trisola

Excellent job on your research mylady.

Chivalry seems both difficult and easy to define, the more different ways I hear it described the better overall appreciation I have for the ideal.

Philip de Ravenshagh

OK, now that we have a better idea of what constitutes knightly virtues and or knightly behaviour let me ask another question that I have been pondering for a long time.

Some of us strive to join the orders of peerage, for example myself being squired to Sir Guillaume aspire to join the order of chivalry. There are many other in our fair barony who aspire to these same goals, is there any non self serving reason to aspire to a peerage?

Obviously to uphold the ideals is noble but now after I have further pondered the situation I wonder if it is noble (by wearing a red belt in my case) to announce that I strive to join the order of peerage.

What are your thoughts and opinions? (BTW Oz this in no way means that I don't want to be your squire)

Keep the debate going

Cheers.

Daniel Russell

Lords and Ladies of the list:

In furtherance of Milord Wulfgar's post on the striving for peerage and self serving worries.

I feel, that it may seem to modest individuals, that it is self serving to aspire to these ideals but the question begs to be asked: why? Why are we aspiring for peerage? It all comes down to intent. If the intention is for self glory then the ideals of peerage have not been met and are therefore self-serving, but if the intent is to gain peerage for the ability to use the gained respect for the betterment of our Barony and the SCA as a whole, as well as ourselves, then there are no self serving worries.

Being a peer of the realm enables a person to espouse their beliefs for the betterment of all in our fair game, and only those who consistently show us

their high ideals are awarded peerages. So I feel that to aspire to these ideals is, to a certain extent self-serving because who wouldn't want to be recognized as an example for others to follow.

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Cheers.
Daniel Russell

Argh.... more tough questions. And this I can only really answer with personal experience and thoughts. Once again rambling from a long tem student to a Peer

I am Protégé to Hrolf. I became his protege in my first year in the SCA and I remember being scared as all hell when I timidly asked if he would consider taking me as his student. Back then I had dreams of becoming a peer, becoming someone people in the group could look up to, aspire to be like. All manner of ideas.

But after he accepted my oath and gave me my yellow belt and I settled down into the SCA my thoughts changed a little through experience

It was 4 years before I got my AOA. By that time everyone I joined with had gotten theirs and either had moved away or stopped playing. I was convinced that I had been found wanting in some major way and that eliminated me forever having the right to aspire to anything.

The only thing I held with pride was the fact that Hrolf might have at some point seen something worthwhile in me. (I still hope he does, he hasn't asked for his belt back yet so, touch wood) But I had given up much hope of achieving any peerage or recognition

Instead I consider myself a student. Hrolf doesn't appear much at events these days, but he's still my Pelican and I can aspire to be as good a person he is.

I still think it's alright to aspire to be a Peer and that it's alright to admit that to other people. I don't believe it's a Taboo. As I was initially led to believe (When I first became Protog I heard that as soon as you admitted you WANTED to be a Peer you immediately eliminated yourself from ever becoming one) Peers are made for their Service and their Prowess, but also because they are considered to hold all those elusive ideals of Virtue and I don't think you should ever be ashamed to admit that you aspire to one day join their ranks. In doing so you are admitting that one-day you want to be some considered worthy of such things.

Many people go through their entire lives in the SCA without even an AOA. Sometimes the Crown may elevate those we don't feel worthy or deserving. It all happens.

But as for me. If one unlikely day I am deemed worthy of becoming a Peer then it will be a proud day for me. But If I never do and stay plain Lady Trisola, aka Min the Merciless and you all consider me a good person or a friend that is enough for me and I know that I am in my way making a contribution and be happy. Its if you all tell me you hate me that I'll believe I am failing my Master and myself

Hope that makes sense
-Trisola

Woohooo what a great conversation. I love it all. Guess I'm an analysis junkie.

So about the question; 'Is it self serving to want to be a Peer?' Here is my take on it, but not a definitive one by any means.

That question has no simple answer, and yet it's the act of having that very debate going on inside a person's head that makes that person worthy of even considering a Peerage. To be a Peer is to serve, nomatter what the brand. To be a Peer is to put oneself up for scrutiny by strangers, assessment of your character, your abilities, your intentions, measured by the yardstick of those who are recognised to be Peers before you. The reward is the feeling that you are found to be worthy, that you may lead with authority (which is invested in you by the people who surround you, and by the Crown), that you may find others for elevation, that you may take on students to teach and guide and accept their fealty, that you may swear fealty to the Crown.

You can be in the SCA and get heaps out of it without being a Peer. For those that attain status as a Baron/ess or King/Queen, most of the rewards are the same, with a slightly different slant.

You can be proud of what you do and who you are as a Peer, but you can be proud of what you do and who you are as a member of the SCA without Peerage, or title.

Is it self-serving to want to serve others? Only if that desire is more about being in the limelight ("look at me, aren't I Good?") than about making the pathway through the SCA more interesting / smoother / better for someone else.

Interestingly, when a person wants to be a Knight, we often praise that person for wanting to follow a noble path. It seems that proto- Pelicans and Laurels are seen more like wanting to be politicians (LOL) or Lecturers. I find it interesting that it's a Squire who has asked this question, and yet it should come as no surprise, as it is a noble question in itself.

I have seen individuals want to be a Knight or a Laurel or a Pel so bad it colours all of their dealings in the SCA world, which serves only to overshadow their true talents. It is easily seen when a Squire is so full of belief they should be recognised (by now) that it affects their fighting and they fail to make the grade, and when they have given up and relaxed, it has all 'come together' and the Chivalry has recognised them with great friendship and joy. It's not so visible with Apprentices and Prot□g□s.

I have the privilege of accepting fealty from people who would be my Prot□g□ or Apprentice. Each Pelican or Laurel sees their students in a very individualistic way. To me it doesn't matter if my students don't attain Peerage. To me it's about what I can do for them, to help tease out nuances and talents that I can see potential for. It is up to each individual as to whether they even want to put themselves to such focused and difficult work to attain a Laurel or a Pelican. I promise nothing about elevation. I promise everything about association with my household, my insights, and my name in return for fealty.

It is a noble thing, in my view, to want to be a Peer, but it's not for everyone. My closest friend whom I have known since primary school gave up his Peerage. He has the talent, but finds the duties unsuitable to his self-view, I think. He's not the only one either.

Well, I hope this has helped. I love blathering on about it all and if anyone wants to ask me stuff, I'm happy to (give a lecture LOL) chat about almost everything in this topic.

Maddie

I would suggest that one should not aspire to the peerage, but to that which makes the particular peerage great. It is a noble thing indeed to aspire to excellence in a field and if by doing so your efforts are recognized by others then so be it. And if not, it should not be seen as a failure of any kind.

Philip de Ravenshagh

Good People,

Yes, it is all in the doing of whatever good deeds we perform, whether we succeed as well as we would like, or not. I agree with Pip, it is the intent. Do you have love, or care, in your heart when you perform the deed, or think the thought, or desire to aspire to a higher position? Do you genuinely believe that service towards others is a reward in itself? Because then, you will not be the loser - whether you succeed to that higher office or not you will have achieved something wonderful by just desiring to serve, and working towards that goal.

It is an honour to be able to serve in whatever way we are capable of so doing. And ultimately, we all crave love and acceptance in some form or another, and if we can find that first unconditionally in our own hearts, then we are getting close to the ideals of chivalry, courtly love, and the Knightly virtues. Easy to say, hard to achieve. But we truly value anything we have needed to work hard to achieve.

Thanks everyone,

Regards and Best Wishes,
Wenefrith

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Philip de Ravenshagh

OK so far we have discussed knightly virtues, so what is seen as the ideals of chivalry and we have discussed somewhat the quest for a peerage and motivations for embarking on such a quest but now let me pose some more questions on the theme to stimulate the brain matter still further.

Do people think that the duties of a peer in the SCA have evolved (Is more or less expected of those being elevated today rather than those elevated say a decade ago)?

If you think that the duties of a peer have changed or even if you don't think they have, what do you see the duties of a peer being in the current Middle Ages?

What do you expect to see from peers?

What would you like to see from peers?

Briefly I from my experiences, what I have been told and what I have read the peers made now have a greater expectation on them and for many reasons I can see why, for example (someone else told me this story, can't remember who its was exactly) some years ago laurels had a certain level of expectation which looking back on it may be considered lower than what it is today but they didn't have the resources that we have now and the availability of information over the internet etc. So it is my personal belief that while retrospectively the standards may have gone up in terms of the availability of information and ability to share knowledge now it is probably on par, perhaps even a little lower than it was, people don't so much seem to push the envelope now that there is a large body of knowledge out there or if they do they get shot down for it in many cases that I have personally seen.

I would say that the duties of the peerage have remained for the most part unchanged however I get the impression and the feeling that there is more expectation placed on things now than there was but I'm not really sure where this feeling is coming from.

There are many things that I expect to see from a peer (and we're all entitled to a bad day here and there) I expect to see a high degree of skill in their chosen field, on par with their brothers and sisters in the peerage. I also expect to see service and I expect to have a degree of courtesy. I expect to see a peers teaching their skills and I expect to see peers turn up to events semi regularly.

What I would like to see is a more holistic approach to the SCA, rather than just focusing on one area of the SCA, however I realise that this is not always practical, mundane life often gets in the way, I don't have a family and I already find it difficult to do some of the things I would like to do in the SCA, like some dancing and cooking and running feasts and things, so I can only imagine what its like when you have a family to think of and work in with or around.

So that's just some of my musing on the subject, turned in to a bit of an essay. What do you all think? (Hopefully this has all come across as intended)

Daniel Russell

I'm not sure it is possible to stay in the SCA and ONLY do one thing ;-)

I know you didn't mean it exactly that we Dan, but if someone had told me that when I joined I would end up with no free time whatsoever!

There are just too many areas of interest. I originally joined the SCA because of an interest in Siege weapons, but I don't seem to have got it out on the field yet. :-)

EtE

Greetings Eirikr,

Does that mean that you will be making a mini siege weapon for Silver Arrow XLII (2007)? :)

Cheers,

Anselm