

The Chivalric Way

Alexa Chipman's Manifesto
June, 2008 Version



Though the age of Chivalry never existed in a historical context, it is an ideal, which is to be looked up to. I am not sure why it became firmly linked in general opinion to the Middle Ages, in which period it had no more presence than in any other era, but no matter the year or date it still illuminates. I must point out this does not refer to Courtly manners or Courtly love. Without getting into all the highly complex ceremony of courts, suffice it to say they involved a great deal of liaisons, and things such as favours, “champions” and the like. It has nothing to do with Chivalry and is often precisely the opposite. Below is a quote regarding one following the path of Chivalry:

“Sweet-natured, courtly, devout, impassioned, patient, enthusiastic over the beauty of life, he may indeed seem weak to a generation setting greatest store by supreme self-confidence and big achievement in material things. But a deeper wisdom recognizes in these very traits the greatest strength— strength to make the distinction between veiled good and evil, both within himself and in the world about him; strength to enjoy the good in all purity; strength to fight evil until he achieves a quiet triumph beyond necessity of compromise; and, above all, strength to submit his life to the direction of God, and overcome the weakness of believing only in his own powers and obeying his own feelings.”
(*Pearl I.iv*)

The following chapters cover the main Chivalric virtues. There are others, but these are the ones I thought were particularly important. The reason love is first is because so many people have questions about my rather odd view.

Love - Personal purity in thought and deed and the Affirmation of Images

Prowess - Skills in all you undertake

Justice - Wishing for truth and right to prevail

Loyalty - Completely steadfast to authority

Honour - Truthful with high ideals

Courage - Willingness to face death for the right causes

Faith - Trust in God and following him

Humility - Willing to serve rather than rule

Largesse - Generosity towards others

Nobility - Courtesy and high birth

Love

The idea of Chivalric love is very difficult to explain to someone entirely unfamiliar with it. It is a concept that is a sort of experiment, as it never truly existed in any place or time. This is not the sort of love that one usually associates with the word, as brought up by Wordsworth:

*“There is higher love
Than this, a love that comes into the heart
With awe and a diffusive sentiment;
Thy love is human merely; this proceeds
More from the brooding Soul, and is divine.”*
(233 Wordsworth “*The Prelude*”)

In other words, most people define love in various types. 1) Crush— a sudden explosion of passion that often ends as quickly as it began. 2) Romantic— a steadier caring of someone, particularly their interests and spending time with them. 3) Lust— wanting to be physically with someone as often as possible. 4) Marriage— less of a flashy love but more constant and closer to affection. Chivalric does not fall into any of those ideas. We can call it 5) Affirmation of the Image— adoration of the spiritual glory of a person which becomes amplified by our love for them and causes us to become a better person for it and closer to the divine.

“The sight of Beatrice filled him with the fire of charity and clothed him with humility; he became -- and for a moment he knew it -- an entire goodwill. Neither of these great virtues is gained by considering oneself; and the apparition of this glory, living and moving in Florence, precisely frees him from the consideration of himself.”
(22 Williams “Figure of Beatrice”)

When you catch sight of the Beloved— even as simple as passing them with a nod— it should cause an upsurge of joy, goodness and passion to love everyone, everything and reach for the higher state of being. In other words to reach beyond the person to a pure spiritual state. It causes one to look on their beauty leading to a contemplation of the beauty of all God’s creation and ultimately to God himself. Often this will not last longer than a few moments after seeing them or something that reminds you of them. But for that brief period, and hopefully longer if you learn to foster it, you attain a higher state of goodness and spiritual love in general.

“Where this romantic adoration exists, there this proper intellectual investigation of it ought to exist... ‘Hero-worship’, and even more sentimental states, are only vaguer and less convincing images of the quality which this love is. They are often foolish, but they are apt also to have that kind of sincerity which may, one way or another, become fidelity to the image or to the principle within and beyond the image. One way or another this state is normal; what is not yet normal is the development of that state to its proper end.”
(16 Williams “Figure of Beatrice”)

As Williams points out, this can be more in a genre of hero-worship than what most people think of love as. However this transcends far beyond that. Fidelity to the image is extremely important, but the ultimate goal is to come to a greater understanding of God’s love.

“The intention of fidelity is the safeguard of romanticism; the turning of something like the vision of an eternal state into a experiment towards that state. Once that experiment has been formally begun, it cannot be safely abandoned.”
(51 Williams “Figure of Beatrice”)

“The quality of love (he maintained) exhibited in her heavenly glory.”
(27 Williams “Figure of Beatrice”)

When you see the Image, you should see an almost glow to the person, and sense that. It is so tactile it literally extends to any others who are with that person. The important thing to remember in all this is that people are far from perfect. Even the person you love is not. This should not hamper the Affirmation of Images in the least, however. They are closer to an Ikon than a living being. They are there to remind one of a higher purpose.

“The girl seems to him something like perfection— though, of course, he knows quite well that she is not, and may even experience quite sharply that she is not. The vision of perfection does not at all exclude the sight of imperfection; the two can exist together; they can even, in a sense, co-inhere. To suppose anything else would be false romanticism of the worst kind.”
(35 Williams “Figure of Beatrice”)

This sort of love is also highly tempered by Resoune (logical thought). It is most often compared to philosophy rather than to an emotional state. This sort of love should lead to higher intellectual paths, rather than descent into lowly emotional and physical desires.

“These then are the four meanings— the lady herself, philosophy itself, rhetoric, the contemplation of the high fervent love of the Spirit, and all these are inter-related, but especially they are all contained in the literal...there is nothing better in a woman than courtesy...(onestade, decency, honour, pietas)— it is all one.”
(59 Williams “Figure of Beatrice”)

*“This spiritual Love acts not nor can exist
Without Imagination, which, in truth,
Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood.”*
(233 Wordsworth “The Prelude”)

Avoidance of Desire

“Love and the gentle heart are one same thing; Love lies asleep in that heart till the beauty of a wise woman (saggia donna) causes it...to awaken, and so in a woman’s heart does the worthiness of a man.”
(28 Williams “Figure of Beatrice”)

Once you realize someone has become the object of adoration, it must quickly be brought in line to the proper Affirmation, and not slide into degeneracy of selfish wishes. If one looks at the Image and has any sort of selfish thoughts of being with the person— even holding conversation, there is something wrong that needs to be eradicated before the Path can be taken once more.

“The clear serenity of the intellectual adoration, which is an element in it however intense it may grow, is hidden and pent by the night of desire...physical intercourse, once established, is apt permanently to cloud the intellectual and to make the memory of it weaker.”
(37 Williams “Figure of Beatrice”)

Because humans have such difficulty avoiding lapsing into the physical, it is tradition in the Way to simply avoid the person altogether. Pass on the opposite side of the path from them, and do no more than a quick glance. You are not to speak to the Image unless absolutely necessary, and certainly not begin what others call a “relationship” with them. If the Image has any idea you love them, you have failed. This is the Way of the love from afar— not unrequited. Unlike what most call unrequited love, this is not an excuse to sit around despairing about why the other person doesn’t love you. There are many works written from this perspective. The Way of Affirmation becomes more, not less difficult, if love is returned. You are never to consider whether the Image cares about you or not. It is irrelevant. You can, however, care deeply if the Image is deliberately cold to you. This hampers the Way. If the Image walks by without noticing you, that can lower the effect of their presence. If they smile and greet you, it can often be enough to sustain throughout the day or weeks to come.

“‘We cannot’, wrote Dante in the third Tractate of the Convivio, ‘look fixedly upon her aspect because the soul is so intoxicated by it that after gazing it at once goes astray in all its operations.’ The first manner in which it goes astray is in a tendency always to extort from the glory its own satisfaction with the glory.”
(48 Williams “Figure of Beatrice”)

You must be careful not to become selfish regarding the state of being brought on by their presence. Selfish desire to be in proximity to the person can often be the same as physical needs. While proximity is helpful, you should not seek it. One must keep distance to avoid carnal desires from overwhelming the sense of the intellectual and divine.

“Cioè a dire che lo mio pensiero sale ne la qualitate di costei in grado che lo mio intelletto no lo puote comprendere; con ciò sia cosa che lo nostro intelletto s’abbia a quelle benedette anime, sì come l’occhio debole a lo sole: e ciò dice lo Filosofo nel secondo de la Metafisica”.

“That is to say that my thought leaps towards the qualities she has to a level that my intellect cannot comprehend: because it is a fact that our intellect fails before those blessed spirits as the eyes do before the sun: and so the Philosopher says in the second book of the Metaphysics.”

(XLI Dante “Vita Nuova”)

While the Affirmation is mostly upon reason, philosophy and intellect, it does possess something of another power that you have to be careful to redirect in the proper spiritual way. It should lead to divine salvation and virtue.

*“Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore
Dico, qual vuol gentil donna parere
vada con lei, chè quando va per via,
gitta nei cor villani Amore un gelo,
per che onne lor pensiero agghiaccia e pére;
e qual soffrisse di starla a vedere
diverria nobil cosa, o si morria;”*

*“Ladies who have knowledge of love
I say, you who would appear a gentle lady
go with her, since when she goes by
Love strikes a chill in evil hearts,
so that all their thoughts freeze and perish:
and any man who suffers to stay and see her
becomes a noble soul, or else he dies.”*

(XIX Dante “Vita Nuova”)

If you look upon your Image, you should become a noble soul or die. There is no halfway point— you either achieve great uplift and virtue, or you slide straight to the Inferno on the fast lane. Things with potential of great good often can be twisted to become great evil. This is why behaving in a reserved and detached manner toward the Beloved is so important.

Glorified Surroundings

I spoke earlier of how when the Image is present, those around them also are touched by the glory. But this applies also to the city the Beloved dwells in. I found this to be true of my own Way long before I knew it had application in anyone else’s. The mere thought of that city should fill your heart with love, joy and peace. Like the person themselves, this does not need to have application in the actual city. If your Beloved lives in, say, Oakland (a city known for its murders and corruption) they can make Oakland beautiful, pure and true.

“A glory lay on the city because of the princely young miracle that walked in it. All this is natural and beautiful. The sweetness -- dolcezza -- of love trembles and sighs everywhere, but in the full sunlight, not in any wistful shadows. It is sweet and generous and noble, full of humility, honour, and courtesy.”

(33 Williams “Figure of Beatrice”)

When the Image moves on, the light fades from that city. When the Image that Dante used, Beatrice, died in 1290, he had this to say about the city she dwelt in:

*“Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo!
How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people!”
Lamentations 1:1*

Again this is referring to the sense of loss, not that there was no-one left living in that city. It is on the spiritual level, not the physical, of the city which we speak of.

In Practice

Like the fact the Knights never particularly managed to follow the Chivalric path (though some did), we will not always be able to either. It is extraordinarily difficult, but not the less worthy for it. You may struggle to keep on the Way your entire life. But if you manage to walk down it, even for a brief while, you will be better for the journey. Many of us slide back into “False Duessa” mode, but always try to get back up after falling down and climb back onto that glorious road that is the Affirmation. In general, the best policy to preserve chastity and true love is to be able to quickly recognize the Beloved and keep as much of a distance as possible. I would also recommend this prayer from the Antiochian Orthodox prayer book:

*“O Blessed Lord, who hast set up for us an example of ideal purity, strengthen me, I beseech thee, when temptation besets me, and when strong passions seek to overwhelm me, that I may remain constant in virtue and innocent in thought, word, and deed, doing such things only as are well-pleasing unto thee; grant me growth in wisdom and understanding, that I may serve thee in holiness all the days of my life: through the intercessions of thine all-immaculate Mother and all thy Saints, especially my patron Saint N. Amen.”
 (“Pocket Prayer Book” 20)*

Prowess

Think of Prowess as whatever you put your mind to it must be done not to the best of your abilities but to the best of anyone’s abilities. It should be of the highest quality—whether it is dusting furniture or programming a web form. In earlier periods, for the knight it meant skill in battle. For the woman, it was her skills in the woman’s arts, such as needlework, music or other related fields. Occasionally the two worlds would come together as a woman took up the lance. When she did, it took training and a strong will and a willingness to endure much pain.

*But one of those sixe knights, Gardante hight,
Drew out a deadly bow and arrow keene,
Which forth he sent with felonous despight,
And fell intent against the virgin sheene:
The mortal steele stayd not, till it was seene...
That drops of purple bloud there out did weepe,
Which did her lilly smock with staines of vermeil steepe
(Spenser 293).*

Whatever task you are set to, perform it to the utmost best of your abilities and reach even beyond that. No job is quickly or shoddily done, each is carefully trained for and executed with intense concentration.

Justice

This virtue is especially tied together with that of Faith and Humility. Justice involves first knowing what the truth is in a situation. This is done through careful gathering of facts, then comparing it to God's law or the laws of the country if they be not different. Whenever a knight flew at another without considering the rightness of it, ill became him. In the same way, before championing a cause remember:

1. Make sure you know what it is you are championing
2. Consider whether it is in line with God's will
3. The party involved must accept you as champion

"If I am to hazard my shield with you, she must accept me as champion" says Lancelot in Knights of the Round Table. In the same way, even if you believe justice ought to be done, do not do it against the wishes of those involved. This has no basis in Chivalry and is what is known as 'interfering' and can have grave consequences. It is perhaps the most difficult virtue because those who truly love justice want it done in all places all the time and will hurt other people to see its fruition. A true knight or lady would never wish it so.

Loyalty

Loyalty has its roots in the idea of kingship and authority. Often this is looked upon with ridicule, but the ancient concept of kingship was not meant to be so.

*He grew taller as he spoke. He threw back his cloak...
his garments shimmered and glinted, and on his
forehead was a great jewel like a radiant star.
His face was young but stern.
("Smith" 55)*

The idea of kingship is lofty and someone you would dedicate your entire life to. Though there aren't really kings today, loyalty is still one of the most important virtues. Without loyalty the entire idea of Chivalry is nothing. The whole-hearted devotion to a particular person or idea is the very core of the Path. It could be your employer, or friend or some other worthy figure. Without delving into the idea of the relationship of the affirmation of the Beloved, loyalty is something that can be practiced with anyone. In friendship this is especially critical and you should treat each person you meet as if they were your closest. This means you would defend and protect them, are always there for them, and show you are trustworthy. Of course the most basic form of loyalty is your loyalty to the path of Chivalry itself.

Occasionally Justice and Loyalty will clash if the person you are loyal to has performed an evil act and requests you assist them with it. In this case Justice takes the upper hand, but one must also keep in mind Nobility and Gracious Conduct. Do not take a pompous higher ground in the matter, but also do not countenance dishonesty.

Honour/Duty

Honour in its most basic form is how well the other chivalric virtues are adapted into everyday life and speech. Most specifically it is how a person reacts in the most difficult situation that shows their true honour. Someone following the chivalric path must be willing to face embarrassment and shame in order to preserve their honour or that of someone else. This must be carefully guarded so as not to become prideful.

An important aspect of honour is death. How a person behaves in their final moments is infinitely important. Do they, like Stephen, follow God's will to the end? In the case of a warrior, an honourable death would be in a closely matched battle or in defence of someone else. Dishonour would come if easily dispatched or dying out of fear or some evil or banal cause. Dying of old age while whining at relatives would be dishonourable, dying of old age with a strength and courage that could inspire would still be an honourable death. For women and those not involved with combat, it is coming to one's end while still retaining Wisdom and Courtesy to others. Of course, if one has lost one's mind that is not always possible. But if one has lived with Honour the rest of years, it is highly probable that even senile some of that will be retained if it was truly part of one.

Courage

selfa ne dorste
under yða gewin
aldre genēpan,
drihtscype drēogan;
þær hē dōme forlēas,
ellen-mærðum.

*“He was not man enough to face the turmoil of a fight
under water and the risk to his life. So there he lost
fame and repute. It was different for the other,
rigged out in his gear and ready to do battle.”
(Beowulf 103)*

Though courage is mostly the willingness to risk death, it is also a willingness to risk embarrassment or perhaps looking silly or stupid to other people. It takes courage to look a handsome young man asking you out in the eye and explain you cannot even think about him in such a way because of the code of honour. It takes courage to be willing to admit you are following the path of chivalry at all.

Courage is often something learned, not something born into you. With each situation your prayer and willingness to try it for the good of the Cause slowly build up until it becomes natural. There is a difference here between flight/flight reactions however. When in a situation where fear is involved, your body becomes ready to react in two ways. It can either run or quickly react to protect itself. The latter reaction can sometimes resemble courage but that is not what it is. If a knife is thrown at you, whether you instantly reach out to catch it, or duck out of its way is very different from willingly stepping into its path to save someone else.

Courage is realizing your fear, analyzing the situation based on the knightly virtues, deciding what the honourable path would be and taking it no matter what the cost. In some cases there is no cost, in others it may mean your very life.

Faith

First you must agree with the entire Nicene Creed. I also believe to appreciate the ancient lineage and mysterious glory, it is best to be a part of one of the more traditional denominations such as Anglican, Orthodox, Catholic or Lutheran, rather than “contemporary” which often makes a mockery of the Chivalric virtues.

*I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible;*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of his Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father;
by whom all things were made;
who for us men and for our salvation
came down from heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried;
and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,
and ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;
and he shall come again, with glory,
to judge both the quick and the dead;
whose kingdom shall have no end.*

*And I believe in the Holy Ghost the Lord, and Giver of Life,
who proceedeth from the Father and the Son;
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified;
who spake by the Prophets.*

*And I believe in one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church;
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins;
and I look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

(BCP 327-8)

Often to reiterate this faith it is traditional to have an all-night vigil in a chapel. Usually this is best done at a retreat house, preferably a silent retreat. Take a sword and stand in the chapel all night praying.

Always spend time studying God's law and reading the Holy Scriptures each day, contemplate and pray over it and memorize applicable passages.

Make sure your life has been dedicated to the ultimate kingship of God, and his laws supersede any of the other Virtues or the law of the land. The primary goal of one on the Path is to serve Him.

Humility

The most universal, no other virtue may be practiced without humility. Largesse without humility is only showing off and becomes Pride, one of the Seven Deadly Sins. Faith, courage and the others must be tempered by it. Again, pride can so easily result by following the path but it is the thing to most eagerly avoid. With the worldliness and opposition to Chivalry so prevalent today it becomes even easier to slip into Pride, so this is perhaps the most important of all the Virtues.

*God bless thee; and put meekness in thy mind,
Love, charity, obedience, and true duty!
(Richard III II.ii)*

Notice it is meekness which is mentioned first, and it must come before love and duty. Without humility all others are nothing.

*Both stricken with one feeling of delight,
An admiration of her modest mien,
And carriage, mark'd by unexampled grace.
Her just opinions, female modesty,
Her patience, and retiredness of mind
Unsoil'd by commendation, and the excess of public notice.
(114 Wordsworth "The Prelude")*

Humility, modesty and meekness go hand in hand. They do not demonstrate weakness but rather strength. Anyone can lord it over others and behave in a pompous manner. It takes incredible strength of character to avoid this.

Largesse

Without being imprudent, this is a very important aspect of chivalry. It might be more commonly known as liberality or generosity now. It means giving of materials, time and mostly money to others. Any funds that are not needed for immediate concerns, and even some that are, should be given away. This could be to those in desperate need or simply to a child down the street that fancies a lolly. Be in the moment and give generously, but not foolishly. This doesn't mean handing money out to anyone who asks for it. Wisdom is an important part of any of the Virtues. Make sure the need is genuine, even if it is merely a wish. I knew someone that really wanted a particular cookbook but couldn't think of a good enough excuse to spend the money to buy it, as their finances were rather tight. I simply bought the book for them. The old saying about it being better to give than receive really is often true. If you are feeling a bit depressed, often the best way to cheer up is not to buy something for oneself but to buy something for another person that the other person really needs or wants. This does not mean getting presents of things or for people that don't want them. Be sure it is something they really want or truly need.

Not to bring up Robin Hood, as he has many characteristics that are entirely against chivalry, but there was a time when everyone was convinced he was murdering innocent villagers. His reaction was to take the very last of his food that he had left and bring it to a starving village who were ready to kill him on sight. That is the sort of attitude this form of Largesse takes. A willingness to give the last coin to a perfect stranger that may even dislike you.

Nobility

First of all this refers to high birth and what line one was descended from. I can trace my family back to a Baron of the Norman conquest if you are looking for pedigree. But not everyone can make vaulted claims, and one must think about what made those original families noble. It was not merely favour of the king and wealth, but courtesy and honour.

Courtesy is a peculiar word to attempt to define. In Chaucer's *Romaunt de la Rose* Bialacoil or Bel-Aciel first came to my attention. It means lovely speech and politeness. But in that tale it is not particularly a good thing, and yet "for certis, it were wrong that I Hated hem for hir curtesye" (Chaucer Line 4565). It is not a bad thing to have, in fact it is to be admired, and the protagonist is merely bemoaning the falseness of Bialacoil. Of course the entire story is an allegory of sorts but the point still holds— be careful that lovely words do not become false words. Honesty and truth is still more important. Yet courtesy is a very good thing to have, and is admired in knights. Malory is quick to point this out upon many occasions when he compares Sir Gawain, who was full of courtesy, with Sir Beaumains.

"Right so the two men departed and beleft him to Sir Kay, that scorned him and mocked him" (Malory 210).

When given an opportunity for courtesy, Sir Kay showed his own base nature in his mocking tone, whereas Sir Gawain was noble throughout. Which of this famous "kitchen boy" story came out looking well in hindsight? Was it the cruel-tongued Sir Kay or Sir Gawain who is now known for courtesy? Now which of those is better to emulate?

Conclusion of Manifesto

There are many other virtues, which are important to consider, but one cannot attempt everything. I could go on at much more length about each, but that may do more to confuse and raise questions than to explain. This was primarily written to give an account of the motivations behind what I attempt to do. For all my failings in these matters I most sincerely apologize, but one isn't perfect on this Earth and to claim to be would be dishonest.

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