

PalaDiary Day 4: Moral Code, 5 Pillars

So back in 2018 when I was first starting to be more deliberate about my paladin identity, I tried to codify as specific personal moral code. I used a metaphorical knightly motif to fit the archetype. I tried to introspect on what values and principles I wanted to cover, and was able to conceptualize it as five core pillars. Then, at the end of the day, I would look back on my actions that day in light of the pillars- which ones did I uphold? Which ones did I neglect? Which ones did I act against? What did I need to change moving forward? While I've changed my approach over time, this system still matters to me as my first pass at a paladin oath. It's described in detail below.

1. Nurturing the Light (Joy, Comfort, Satisfaction)

Nurturing the light means anything that produces good things. The light rejuvenates and replenishes. Joy is one way light manifests. But seeking comfort when hurt, taking care of one's body and mind, or working hard on a personal project are some of the ways to nurture light, even if they aren't inherently pleasant or fun. This pillar is about how one can't fill from an empty cup, and asks the Paladin to take care of themselves and keep themselves safe and capable.

Examples: Reading a good book, eating a favorite food, doing regular therapy (physical or mental), getting a hug from a loved one, achieving a difficult project.

Symbol: A helmet or armor- that which keeps the knight safe and protected.

2. Sharing the Light (Community, Support, Giving)

Sharing the light means bringing joy, comfort, and satisfaction to others, spreading it beyond. This can sometimes be one-sided or energy-requiring, such as giving gifts or providing emotional support. But sharing energy can often be recursive, and produce just as much joy in the sharer, such as when sharing a joyous event with others. This step is crucial to relationship maintenance of all kinds.

Examples: Complimenting someone, listening to a friend in need, sharing a meal with someone, 'I saw this and thought of you'.

Symbol: A shield. The thing that the knight presents outwardly to others and can be identified by, the thing that can strengthen or protect others.

3. Fighting monsters (Action, Defense, Change)

One of the quotes in my book of Arthurian myths is "Nevertheless, he would not let himself be slain tamely". If Nurturing the Light is about adding good, Fighting Monsters is about removing evil. This can be direct, as when calling someone out or defending someone against bullying. But slow, gradual action- such as political activism- is also necessary so that the monsters are weakened in the long term, or never emerge at all.

Examples: Standing up to a bully, protesting, voting, educating someone who is ignorant or harmful, defending yourself from bad-faith attacks.

Symbol: The sword, by which a knight actively defeats threats.

4. Following the Quest (Perseverance, Diligence, Effort)

I wanted something to represent diligence and commitment. All of the pillars above don't mean much if

one doesn't actually follow through. Following the Quest is about consistency and hard work. It means dedicating oneself to a cause (big or small) and sticking with it. It means following through, doing the best one can, and maintaining structure and personal order.

Examples: Keeping promises, being punctual, not procrastinating, keeping up regular effort toward one's goals.

Symbol: The horse, which carries the knight along quests and gets them to their destination.

5. Respect the Liege (Respect, Loyalty, Honor)

While there is a lot to be said about questioning authority and obedience, I feel the Paladin archetype cannot be complete without acknowledging fealty and devotion. Respecting the Liege is about proper deference and social place. It means treating others courteously and as masters of their own experience. It means never taking control of another or acting without their consent- I am not their liege. It also means recognizing that one never truly achieves alone- whether on the small scale of bosses at work, the middle scale of the public works of society and achievements of predecessors, or the universal scale of being a creation of the gods (in my personal faith). This does not mean obeying corrupt authorities that cause harm to others or the world, as that would be a Monster to Fight.

Examples: Using correct names, pronouns and titles, protecting the environment, learning community history, thanking someone who taught or helped you.

Symbol: The ring. Whether kissing the ring of the king, or the ring given my the maiden as a token of her love, the ring is the object that represents loyalty to another.

How these relate to one another

These five pillars weave together. Nurturing and Sharing the light are most obviously related. Both make good in the world, either focused on the self or on others. Fighting Monsters is the necessary counterbalance. Providing joy to someone does not do much to remove the causes of their pain and fear. Removing a source of trouble does not, in itself, produce positivity. Neither is sufficient alone. But it is easier to have and appreciate light when there aren't monsters plaguing one, and it is easier to fight and defeat monsters if one has the support and energy of the light. The work together like sword and shield. Following the Quest is what provides backbone to the other pillars and makes them achievable rather than distant, imagined ideals. Together, Nurturing the Light and Following the Quest cover goals and achievements- the quest in the diligence required, the light in the feeling of satisfaction and pride upon completion. On its own, Following the Quest is amoral- it is about means, not ends. It is the pillars of Sharing the Light and Respecting the Liege that add the moral valence of respect and courtesy to others, and place value on things beyond the self.