

Chapter Seven: The Path of Transcendence

We finally arrive at the most important character in *The Lord of the Rings*: Frodo the Ringbearer. Frodo's path transcends that of any other hero in literature. On the surface, the least likely of heroes, always aware of how ill-equipped he is to carry such a great burden, he accomplishes more than any of the seemingly greater figures like Kings and Wizards, Elves and Dwarves. The least becomes the greatest. Unlike all the other heroes in the book, Frodo's task continues after the destruction of the Ring and the end of Sauron, even after the crowning of Aragorn as king, even after the battle for the Shire. The others move on with their lives, the darkness forgotten. But, Frodo, by carrying the weight of evil when no one else could or would, has looked too deeply into the darkness to ever again live fully in the light. Somehow he must find a way to live with that inner darkness, to integrate it into his life. That burden is now a part of his very being, something that he will have to struggle with to the end of his days. His is the modern condition that faces so many of us in our own path toward enlightenment and, hopefully, transcendence.

HOW BINGO BECAME FRODO

Tolkien had such a great success with his children's book, *The Hobbit*, that his publisher, Stanley Unwin, encouraged him to write a sequel. He initially tried to give Unwin some miscellaneous short stories for children, hoping that would satisfy him, but Unwin wanted Hobbits. Tolkien then passed on a voluminous pile of manuscript. This was his work on *The Silmarillion*, his long dreamed-of, and never-to-be-completed history of the First and Second Ages of the world (and what took place in the Third Age up to the days when the yet undreamt-of War of the Ring would take place). Unwin's in-house readers had no idea what to make of all this, and Unwin again pushed Tolkien to write something new

about Hobbits. Eventually Tolkien gave way and began the story of Bilbo's birthday party. At this point, Tolkien knew nothing about the central significance the Ring was to later have in his story. Bilbo's vanishing was simply intended to be a prelude to further adventures where he went looking for still more dragon's gold.

As Tolkien wrote more, however, he soon realized that he had already said most of what he had to say about Bilbo. He decided to have Bilbo pass the Ring on to his son after the birthday party, and the son would become the hero of the new book. Since, at this point, he was still intending to write a tale for children, this character was called Bingo (!). Over time, however, as the story grew in darkness and the earlier parts were modified many times, Tolkien came to realize that this was no longer a children's story. The name Bingo seemed clearly inappropriate for this darker story, so Bingo disappeared and a previous minor character, Frodo, took his place. Happily for us.

In the final version that we read, Frodo is no longer Bilbo's son, but his much younger, favorite cousin. Typical of the way that Hobbits say something light when they mean something deep, before Bilbo's 99th birthday, he told Frodo (who was about to turn 21) that they might as well live together since they shared the same birthday (Sept. 22nd); that way they could share their birthday parties. And so from then on, Frodo lived with Bilbo. *The Lord of the Rings* opens twelve years later with the preparations for Bilbo's eleventy-first birthday, which will coincide with Frodo's 33rd birthday. Though, as we pointed out in chapter One, Hobbits are longer-lived than humans, still 111 is quite an age. And 33 marks the coming-of-age for Hobbits, so this is a propitious event for both Bilbo and Frodo.

At this point in the story, Frodo is presented as an amiable young (by Hobbit standards) Hobbit who clearly loves Bilbo. Only at the end of the chapter, after Bilbo has left the Shire, do we have the

first inkling of the dangers that lie ahead for Frodo. Gandalf warns him to be careful of the Ring, whose full significance even Gandalf does not yet know. Bilbo has already told both of them separately the true story of how he acquired the Ring from Gollum, so that much they know. But they don't know yet that this is the Ring that belonged to Sauron, the One Ring that has power over all the other great Rings. Gandalf, however, already senses something and warns Frodo twice to be careful of the Ring and never use it: "keep it safe, and keep it secret."¹

After Bilbo's departure, Frodo has seventeen years to enjoy himself as lord of the manor before Gandalf returns to start him on his Quest. When he reappears, Gandalf explains how dire the circumstances are already, with the nine Ring-Wraiths on their way to the Shire to find the Ring. Well-fed and happily indolent, Frodo hardly seems a likely candidate to accomplish great things. Yet Frodo immediately grasps how important it is to prevent Sauron from reacquiring the Ring. With no hesitation, he prepares to leave his comfortable home, not even knowing where he will go. Amazed by this display of bravery, Gandalf tells him that: "Hobbits really are amazing creatures ... You can learn all that there is to know about their ways in a month, and yet after a hundred years they can still surprise you at a pinch."²

And so are all of us "amazing creatures." When the necessity arises, if we turn away from all the things we think are important (like security and comfort) and instead look within, we can tap resources that we never knew we possessed, resources that go beyond our

¹I, 54.

²I, 78.

existence as mortal creatures. And each of us must at some time start the journey to fulfil our destiny, just as Frodo starts his journey.

Soon Frodo and his Hobbit companions (Merry, Pippin, and Sam) are on the road where their adventures start. After an encounter with a Black Rider, they meet a party of High Elves, led by Gildor. When Gildor offers them lodging for the night, Frodo surprises us with his scholarship, thanking Gildor gracefully in High Elven speech. Later in the night, he tells Gildor of his perilous situation and asks him for advice. When Gildor is overly subtle, seemingly reluctant to tell him anything, Frodo teases him: "Go not to the Elves for counsel, for they will say both no and yes."⁶

Often, when we turn to "experts" for advice, they do little but confuse us, presenting arguments for any option we could pick. The last thing they want to do is to take a moral stand, which might turn out to have bad consequences. So ultimately, we are forced back on our own judgement.

TOM BOMBADIL

In the Second Age of the world there were many great forests, but they were cut down by the Númenóreans, the great Men of the earlier Age from whom Aragorn descended. Now only two such great forests remain: the old Forest of the North, in which Frodo and his friends are wandering, and Fangorn in the South, which takes its name from Fangorn (Treebeard). Both forests remember how their fellow trees were destroyed by men, and neither is a welcome place for humans (or Hobbits) to visit. Frodo, however, hoping to avoid the Black Riders, decides to get off the road and take a "short

³I,100.

cut" through the Old Forest of the North on the way to the Inn of the Prancing Pony. This short cut will turn out to be anything but short and will lead the Hobbits twice into danger, both times to be saved by Tom Bombadil. And it is Tom Bombadil that we need to understand because he alone stands outside all the troubles and strife of Middle Earth.

Once inside the Old Forest, the Hobbits are soon lost. After wandering to no purpose for hours, in a scene reminiscent of Dorothy and her companions on the field of poppies in "The Wizard of Oz," Frodo and his friends find themselves getting sleepier and sleepier. Merry and Pippin nap against a huge tree, the Old Willow Tree, while Frodo goes around to the river side of the tree, hoping to revive himself by bathing his face. Instead he, too, falls asleep, leaning against the tree. He awakens in distress to find that he's been thrown into the river by the Tree, whose roots are pushing him down beneath the water. Thankfully ever-faithful Sam hears Frodo's call for help and pulls him out before he drowns. When they look for Merry and Pippin, they find that Pippin has already been sucked inside the great tree, through a crack which has now closed up again. Merry has not yet been fully swallowed and is stuck half in and half out of the tree. All Frodo and Sam can think to do is to light a fire, hoping it will frighten the tree into releasing Merry and Pippin. Instead it merely angers the Old Willow, which begins to squeeze Merry harder. With no idea what to do next, Frodo runs around calling for help.

Once we start our journey, which is always an inner journey, we are likely to encounter ancient, inhuman forces, forces that are never exposed to the light of day, the light of consciousness. They are rooted in the forces of nature themselves, and while not inherently evil, they are not fond of being disturbed. We do well to tread lightly in such

circumstances.

Tom Bombadil appears, seemingly in answer to Frodo's call for help, singing a happy song, a song about himself and his lovely wife Goldberry. When he sees Merry and Pippin's predicament, he puts his mouth to the crack in the tree and sings into it, a song that tells the Old Willow to release the Hobbits. Then he breaks off a branch and begins to whack the tree with it, calling out "You let them out again, Old Man Willow! What be you a thinking of? You should not be waking. Eat earth! Dig Deep! Drink water! Go to sleep! Bombadil is talking!"⁴

If in danger against these ancient forces, often our only recourse is to appeal to higher power for help. Deep within us, we have access to such benevolent powers; the powers are not ours, but we can appeal to them through techniques such as Active Imagination.⁵ When we do so, these powers will almost invariably take personified form— when we are dealing with forces beyond human definition, we humans seem to need to personify them in order to have a frame of reference we can accept. For example, when Jacob needed to struggle with divinity in order to bring forth a new self-definition, he experienced it as wrestling with a mysterious stranger. Bombadil is such a force, and as such beyond even

⁴I,139.

⁵Active Imagination is a method created by Jung to complement dream work. In its simplest form, one takes anything symbolic, such as a scene in a dream, or even a single image in a dream, and then lets it expand within oneself. This can be visual, simply letting a scene unfold, or oral, engaging in conversation with the image. There are many other possibilities. But the key is the word "active". One has to first let imagination have its way, but then second, one has to engage actively with what the imagination produces. This differs sharply from, for example, channeling, where one simply allows the unconscious to flow through oneself, with no intervention.

something as old as the Willow. He reminds the Old Willow that it has its own life to live and should not be interfering in human lives, any more than they should be interfering in its life.

After rescuing the Hobbits, Tom takes them home with him to recover from their ordeal. Later that evening, while sitting with Bombadil and Goldberry over a wonderful dinner, Frodo asks whether Tom heard his call for help, or whether it was just a lucky chance that he appeared then. Tom says "just chance brought me then, if chance you call it. It was no plan of mine, though I was waiting for you."⁶

Time and time again once we are on our chosen path, we will find that synchronicities multiply. Chance becomes something other than chance when it has meaning and answers need. But not in a causal way that we are familiar with from our normal outer life. Rather fate is already waiting for us, even though we did not now we would take this particular path. Once we grow more used to such synchronicities, we see them everywhere in life. But in special times, including emergencies, synchronicities tend to multiply.

After spending a magical night with Tom Bombadil and Goldberry, and after a hearty breakfast (which no Hobbit would willingly miss) the next morning, the Hobbits hear Goldberry outside in the hills singing a song of rain. Soon everywhere around the house the rain pours down. Tom comes into the house, telling them that it's "Goldberry's washing day;"⁷ Evidently, when a force of nature such as

⁶I,145.

⁷I,149.

Goldberry washes, it's all of nature that she washes. With the rain pouring down, Tom sits down, gets comfortable, and begins to tell the Hobbits "tales of bees and flowers, the ways of trees, and the strange creatures of the Forest, about evil things and good things, things friendly and things unfriendly, cruel things and kind things, and secrets hidden under brambles."⁸ And then he tells tales of men and their silly doings, of wars and pillaging, of kingdoms that rose and fell. And how now the spoils of those wars lie with the dead in barrows where ghosts, barrow-wights, sometimes walk.

Here we might have the best advice Tolkien can give us about the struggle with darkness that occupies the rest of the book, the struggle that leaves Frodo wounded for the rest of his life. Once we were a part of Nature, like bees and flowers and trees and other creatures of the forest. Then Humans developed consciousness and could not only participate in Nature, but could step aside and observe it objectively. Observation led to knowledge, knowledge to power, and power too often corrupted. Where once we existed within the rhythms of the natural world, we increasingly forgot that we were part of that world, and instead attempted to control it, as if we were more important than Nature. But to Tom Bombadil, who existed before Nature even took form, all of our deeds are simply silly little games that pass away while Nature endures.

Frodo begins to realize that he has no category in which to include Tom Bombadil; he is more than anything Frodo has even considered can exist in the world. He asks "who are you, Master?"⁹ And

⁸I,149.

⁹I,150.

Tom tells him that he is "Eldest. . . . Tom was here before the first raindrop and the first acorn. He was here before the Kings and the graves and the Barrow-wights. When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas were bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless—before the Dark Lord came from Outside."¹⁰

Thus Tom was there before anything that existed. We earlier characterized Bombadil as a force of nature beyond human definition, but he seems to be more yet. Perhaps he might best be seen as Nature before nature forms. And note that he is benevolent! Over the course of his journey, Frodo will be wounded by darkness, a darkness that seems like it will swallow everything good and pure, but somehow he finds a way back to the natural world he loves so much: best represented by the Shire. His task will be to chew on the darkness long enough that eventually he can come back to the light with what he has learned from the darkness. And he must never forget Tom Bombadil, and his innate goodness, a reminder that before everything that man created, there was already good in the world.

Having told tales all through the day, Goldberry returns from her washing, and all have another enormous dinner together. Afterwards they listen to Goldberry singing songs that create pictures in their minds. Then she goes off to bed and leaves Tom to ask them questions. He already knows much of their situation and soon has pulled the rest out of them. Knowing all, he asks to see the Ring. Frodo is surprised to find himself taking it off its chain and handing it to Tom, who looks through it with a laugh,

¹⁰I, 151.

then slips in on his finger. And, unlike Frodo and everyone else on Middle-Earth, he does not disappear: Tom remains Tom, unchanged by the Ring. He takes it off and tosses it in the air, where it disappears. Before Frodo can react, the Ring has reappeared and Tom hands it to Frodo. Tom has no interest in such things, but Frodo is a doubting Thomas, wondering if Tom has played some trick on him. So Frodo puts on the Ring, (for the first time in the book) and vanishes from everyone's sight. Everyone, that is, except Tom: when Frodo sneaks toward the door, Bombadil tells him to come back and take off the Ring. He looks better without it. Stay and talk a while longer.

Tom Bombadil is not bound by laws that affect humans and Hobbits, Elves and Dwarves and Wizards. The One Ring, so powerful that the fate of Middle Earth hangs on a balance because of its very existence, is for Tom only a pretty piece of jewelry. It has no effect on him: he doesn't vanish, he doesn't stop seeing Frodo when Frodo vanishes from the other's sight. Tom exists in a reality more primary than the reality within which all the others live.

The next morning the Hobbits are off again, with directions from Tom, and a warning not to fool with the barrow wights. And he also leaves them with a song to sing if, despite his warnings, they get into trouble. Off they go. Throughout the morning, they seem to make good progress, but when they stop for lunch, once again they grow careless. They lean against a cool standing stone to rest and lunch. After a Hobbit-sized meal, they find themselves taking a Hobbit nap, just as if they were still safe in the Shire. But they are not safe in the Shire: when they waken, the sun is setting and everywhere around them is thick fog. It is already too late for a safe passage through the barrows. In the fog, the company becomes separated, and one by one, they are mesmerized and taken underground by the Barrow-

wights, the ghosts who guard the treasures hidden within their barrows. When Frodo awakens, he finds himself imprisoned inside a barrow, under the earth, under the spell of a Barrow-wight. He can see Sam, Pippin, and Merry all lying as if dead. Everywhere about them lie treasures of gold and jewels. The three have been dressed in white and adorned with such treasures. Most ominously a sword lies across all three necks.

He hears a cold song, a chant of death. Then he sees a hideous arm walking on its fingers toward Sam, ready to seize the sword that lies across the necks of the Hobbits. Though he briefly considers putting on the Ring and escaping, Frodo would never leave his friends to this awful fate. Pulling his hand back out of his pocket, where it had involuntarily begun reaching for the Ring, Frodo finds the strength to grab a nearby sword and hack off the hand. The sword shatters, a Barrow-wight screams and the little light there was in the barrow is extinguished.

Once again we see that Frodo is special. Whereas the other Hobbits lie as if dead, Frodo alone wakes and observes his surroundings. Though his fear is great and there is a temptation to put on the Ring and escape, instead he finds the courage to protect his friends.

At this moment of urgency, Frodo remembers the song Tom Bombadil told him to sing if he were ever in need of his help. When he sings, Tom, who has no fear of Barrow-wights (or for that matter, of anything else), comes to their rescue. Tom sings the Barrow-wights out of their own barrow, never to return. He and Frodo carry the others to safety. Then Tom goes back inside and comes back carrying some of the treasure. He sings the three mesmerized Hobbits back to life. They are startled, at first not remembering who they are, filled instead with memories of the dead in whose home they had

lain. As usual, Sam is the first to bring things back to normalcy—he wants to know what happened to his clothes?

Every time there is trouble Tom appears, and each time he sings to take away the evil. Tom seems to know that song heals at the very deepest level. And what is song? The merging of word and music. One of the famous phrases in the New Testament of the Christian Bible is "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). A little later in his gospel, John adds that "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Let's ignore the religious interpretation of this and simply view it as a beautiful way to say that words are where the human meets the divine. And throughout all human history the sacred has been expressed in words set to music. In Sam's chapter, we saw how when Frodo was tied up in the tower by the Orcs, it was Sam's spontaneously composed song that led him to Frodo. And when the Hobbit's were trapped in the barrow, it was Frodo singing Tom's song that brought Tom to their aid.

Tom tells them to stop worrying about silly things like clothes when they have barely escaped with their lives. He leaves them to recover while he goes off to find their ponies. The Hobbits dress themselves in spare clothing from the packs on the ponies, then Tom gives them each a dagger taken from the treasure trove to serve as swords for the Hobbits. It is one of these daggers, forged by the Great Men of the earlier ages, that Merry much later uses to stab the Lord of the Nazgûls before he can kill Éowyn!

Dressed and armed, mounted on their ponies, the Hobbits are finally ready to make their way

back to the road. Given the troubles they've experienced so far, Bombadil decides to accompany them to the road that will lead toward The Prancing Pony. When they reach the road, they try to persuade him to accompany them to the inn, but Tom says that "Tom's country ends here: he will not pass the borders. Tom has his house to mind, and Goldberry is waiting."¹¹

There are limits to Tom's domain. And undoubtedly it has shrunk over time, as Middle Earth has lost its contact with the natural world. And that is why we have spent so much time talking about Frodo's experience of Tom Bombadil. This may seem like an innocent interlude in the story, but it's of the essence in understanding Frodo's task and the pain he carries with him. The world of the Shire which he loved so much and which he left to carry the Ring, is a world where Hobbits still exist in harmony with nature. The world that Sauron would create is one where everything natural is destroyed, just as Saruman destroys the trees in order to create the machinery of death Sauron needs. In Tom Bombadil, we see Nature before Nature took the forms we see all about us. We talk about Mother Nature, but Tom is Father Nature. Within his world there can be both good and evil, since man's moral judgements do not yet apply, but there is nothing of the evil that only comes with man's existence. At its base, the darkness with which Frodo will struggle is the absence of Tom and the natural world, the inability to connect with that world. And we've been given the clue that it is song that is the essence of that world. Frodo doesn't sing many songs as his journey grows darker.

¹¹I,169.

WOUNDED BY DARKNESS

Because Frodo is the central figure in *The Lord of the Rings*, we have heard much of Frodo's story through his interactions with our other heroes in earlier chapters. For example, in Aragorn's chapter, the Path of the King, we saw how Frodo foolishly put on the Ring in the Inn of the Prancing Pony. Warned by Strider of the danger facing him, Frodo is at first put off by this dark, menacing stranger. But, regardless of the frightening outer appearance Strider presents to Frodo and his friends, it is Frodo who first recognizes Strider as someone to be trusted. While Sam worries that he might be one of Sauron's spies, Frodo sees through Strider's rough exterior to the greatness within and says that "I think one of his [i.e., Sauron's] spies would—well, seem fairer and feel fouler, if you understand."¹² Even this early in his own development, Frodo is able to recognize the good in others, even when the good is hidden from view. This is an ability that will stand him in good stead many times over the course of his journey, most especially with Gollum.

Though at this point, Strider leads the company, it is already Frodo who is the center, the person for whom Strider would give his life.

Once we are on our journey, if it is a true journey to which we have been called, we have to trust our instincts, our sense of what and who is good or bad. Time and again we will need to make choices despite our seemingly more rational self telling us that this doesn't make any sense at all. We need different guides on an inner journey.

With Strider leading the way and the Black Riders not far behind, the journey soon becomes

¹²I, 194.

much darker. Despite Strider's skill at taking a circuitous path through the wilderness on the way to the Elven kingdom of Rivendell, the party is forced to stop on Weathertop, where they hoped, in vain, to find Gandalf. During the night they are attacked by five of the Black Riders, including their leader, the Lord of the Nazgûls. In his terror as they crowd around him, Frodo makes a terrible mistake: he puts on the Ring, which causes him to enter the nether-world where the Ring-Wraiths truly live, where they can now see him. The leader stabs Frodo with a poisoned sword—one might almost say he stabs him with darkness. At this desperate moment, Frodo does the right thing and removes the ring, just before losing consciousness. Aragorn fights like a demon and drives the Black Riders away before they can kill Frodo and steal the Ring.

Poisoned by the wound, in the days that follow Frodo grows progressively more ill. Only Strider's knowledge of herb lore keeps him alive, but, at this stage of Strider's own development, his power and skill is insufficient to do more than buy time until they can get to Rivendell. Once Frodo crosses the ford and enters the kingdom of Rivendell, a combination of Elrond's and Gandalf's magical powers swallow up the Black Riders in a raging flood, saving him. But, though Elrond's healing powers are great enough to be able to save Frodo's life, this wound will never be fully healed. A portion of darkness, of Sauron's kingdom, has entered into Frodo, where it will eat away at him forever.

None of us is perfect, we all make mistakes, often big mistakes, especially in the early parts of our journey. And sometimes those mistakes might, seen within a bigger picture, be necessary. Though Frodo's fear leads him to put on the Ring, and that leads him to be stabbed with darkness, it is just that connection with darkness that gives him such pity later for Gollum. And without Gollum, the Ring would never have been destroyed. We all

have to be wounded in order to grow to a new level. It is that open wound that is our connection to deeper things.

In some ways, Frodo's journey really starts at this point. It is no surprise that at the Council of Elrond, while the others are squabbling over the impossibility of destroying the Ring, it is Frodo who offers to carry it the rest of the way: "I will take the Ring, though I do not know the way."¹³ Nor is it surprising that Elrond immediately acknowledges him as the proper Ring bearer: "I think this task is appointed for you, Frodo; and that if you do not find a way, no one will."¹⁴ After all, Frodo alone has been a Ring bearer already, and Frodo alone has been wounded by the darkness. Who else to carry the ring to Mount Doom?

Elrond is presented as the male counterpoint to Galadriel. Both can see deeply into others, though perhaps Galadriel sees deeper. Both have foreknowledge of what is to come, though perhaps Elrond sees farther. So he already sees Frodo's quality long before the others (save Gandalf) do. And he sees how events will unfold, with Frodo at the center of those events.

Carrying both the Ring without, and the darkness within, Frodo is never free from further attacks by various of Sauron's minions. Whether Black Riders or Orcs or other darker forces, they always recognize Frodo as the important person in the group, the one who must be captured and taken to Sauron. Intelligence is not a factor; darkness speaks to darkness. For example, outside the Mines of Moria, a giant squid-like sea creature singles out Frodo from the group. It grabs Frodo's foot with one

¹³I,298.

¹⁴I,299.

of its tentacles and begins to drag him into the water. When Sam slashes at the tentacle and frees Frodo, the entire company flees into the mines. Foiled in his attempt to capture Frodo, the sea creature pulls the massive doors closed, then blocks the entrance with boulders and uprooted trees. The company is now trapped in the dark of the mines, where other creatures can make their attempt to capture Frodo and the Ring. Deep in the catacombs, the company is attacked by a horde of Orcs, whose leader somehow knows to attack Frodo. He stabs Frodo with a spear, seemingly killing him. But he is not dead—when Frodo left Rivendell, it was with two great gifts from Bilbo: his sword Sting and a vest made of mithril. It is this mithril vest, worth a king's ransom, that saves Frodo. So, just as powerful forces are at work in an attempt to bring Frodo and the Ring to Sauron, so too are powerful forces at work to protect him. Thus Frodo is the place where both darkness and light meet.

And in our individual inner journeys, we live at just that critical balance point between light and dark, conscious and unconscious, good and bad.

THE MIRROR OF GALADRIEL

When the company is brought before Celeborn and Galadriel in Lothlórien, Galadriel looks into each of their souls. She stares directly at Frodo as she tells the company that "your Quest stands upon the edge of a knife. Stray but a little and it will fail, to the ruin of all. Yet hope remains while the Company is true."¹⁵

Though Galadriel might not see the future as clearly as Elrond, she sees exactly what the state of things is at any point in time. We need to appeal to both the Elrond and the

¹⁵I,390.

Galadriel within us for knowledge along the way.

After spending some time in her kingdom recovering their strength and their spirit, one evening Galadriel silently beckons Frodo and Sam to follow her. She leads them into an enclosed garden, down a flight of stairs into an enclosed green glade, through which a silver stream runs. In the middle stands a silver pedestal with a silver vase beside it. All is green or silver in Galadriel's world! She uses the silver vase to capture the silver water and fill the silver basin. Then she asks them if they want to look within. We have already discussed the vision of a decimated Shire that Sam saw in Galadriel's Mirror. Poor Sam wishes he had never asked to see Elf magic.

When she asks Frodo, wise Frodo asks whether she advises him to do so. But Galadriel only brings people to her Mirror; it is up to them whether or not they look. So Frodo gazes into the mirror and sees the figure of a wizard approaching. It might be Gandalf, but the wizard is dressed all in white, with a white staff, and Gandalf the Grey is dead. The wizard's head is bowed too low for Frodo to be sure who it is: Gandalf? Saruman? Only later will he find this is a vision of the reborn Gandalf who Frodo will meet again only after fulfilling his Quest.

He then sees Bilbo stirring about in his room. His papers are disordered and outside it's raining. Thus a picture of discord with one he loves the most.

The Mirror begins to show him deeper things. He sees scenes that he realizes are part of the great sweep of history that has led to this point, where Frodo now takes his place in history.

He sees a great storm at Sea. Though he has never seen the Sea, he knows it instantly. Out of the West comes a tall black ship. Though he doesn't know it now, this is the ship Aragorn will use to save Minis Tirith from falling.

And then, in horror Frodo sees the Eye of Sauron growing ever larger in the Mirror, searching in every direction for the One Ring, the Ring Frodo carries on a chain around his neck. As he watches, the Ring grows so heavy that it pulls him down toward the water in the bowl. It is only when he hears Galadriel's voice telling him not to touch the water that the Eye fades away and Frodo finds himself once more in the green glade. Freed from the Eye, he looks to Galadriel and sees a ring on her finger, a ring that reflects the light of the stars, and he knows that she, too, is a ring-bearer, one who wears one of the three great rings given to the Elves.

So like meets like, even if the comparison of a great Elf queen with a little Hobbit, might seem strange. When the field is narrowed to those who are ring-bearers, there are very few who know what it means: Sauron and Elrond and Galadriel and Frodo and, briefly in the future, Sam. And, of course, Gollum! On our own journey, we find that the number of people who are also on the journey narrows the farther we go.

Frodo, ever aware of greatness when he encounters it, offers the One Ring to Galadriel, admitting that his task is probably too much for him.. She laughs and tells him: "In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! . . . All shall love me and despair"¹⁶ As she talks, she grows taller and even more beautiful, if that is possible. Then she laughs again, rejects the Ring and becomes the Galadriel that all love, in her simplicity and earthly beauty. "I pass the test. I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel."¹⁷ Yes, she passes the test, as did Gandalf and Aragorn before her, and as will Faramir after

¹⁶I,399.

¹⁷I,400.

her.

As they leave the green glade, Frodo asks why it is, since he wears the One Ring, that he cannot look into the minds of all the other ring-bearers. Galadriel tells him that he could, but that it requires such great power that the attempt would destroy him. But that, regardless, he has indeed grown more perceptive: he has seen deeply into her thoughts; he has seen the Eye; he has seen the ring upon her finger. At that she turns to Sam and asks if he saw the ring and he confesses that he wondered what in the world they were talking about as he only saw star light on her finger. And good, simple Sam tells her that he wishes she'd take Frodo up on his offer and accept the Ring. He knows she'd "put things to rights."¹⁸ But Galadriel knows that over time, the Ring would be too great a temptation even for her. Frodo and Sam leave together, each having learned perhaps more than they want to know.

FRODO AND BOROMIR

Galadriel has already seen into Boromir's heart and knows how he lusts for the Ring and the power it carries, power he thinks he can use wisely to defend his beloved Minis Tirith. But she is wise enough to know that it is not her place to stop events before they happen; they must unfold in their own time.

When the company leaves Lothlórien, none is sure where they will go next: West with Boromir toward Minis Tirith or East toward Mordor? They are able to put off the decision for a while by going down the Great River which for a distance at least is common to both choices. But eventually they come to a place where a choice must be made and the burden of the choice lies on Frodo. He asks for an hour to be alone with his thoughts before he gives his decision.

¹⁸400.

Frodo needing time alone to collect his thoughts is reminiscent of the story of Jesus in Gethsemane on the night before he was taken in custody. Both Jesus and Frodo would like their burden to be lifted from them, as would be all. But once you've started on your path, you have to carry the burden no matter where it takes you.

But Boromir is afraid that the decision has already been made to go East toward Mordor, so he follows Frodo and confronts him, at his smiling best, using all his skills of persuasion to convince Frodo to give him the Ring. When Frodo reminds him of the Council of Elrond, when all agreed that the power of the Ring was too great to be borne by anyone, Boromir's true intentions become clear. Such power belongs not to Elves or Hobbits or sly wizards, but to "truehearted men" like himself, men strong enough to carry any burden, powerful enough to know that one has to be ruthless when fighting an enemy such as Sauron. But Boromir is a warrior not a diplomat; he soon loses his temper with this silly Hobbit who would deliver the Ring right into Sauron's hands.

When he leaps at Frodo trying to grab the Ring, Frodo puts on the Ring for the fourth time. He had done this for the first time out of suspicion with Tom Bombadil, for the second out of foolishness in the Prancing Pony, when he did not yet know its full power. And he put it on for the third time upon Weathertop in a desperate attempt to escape from the Black Riders. But that only allowed the Black Riders to see him all the better, and led to a wound of darkness that he would carry forever. This time it is necessary to take the risk in order to preserve the Ring from Boromir. With the strange sight that the Ring gives, he sees war coming from all directions, all under the control of Sauron. And then the Eye of Sauron seeks him, calling him. An inner voice, Gandalf's voice tells him to take off the Ring. For the first time, Frodo realizes that he is not under the control (at least yet) of either the Eye or the Voice. He has

a choice and he decides to take off the Ring, just in time before Sauron would have had him under his control.

The farther Frodo goes on his quest, the greater temptation the Ring presents, and the greater possibility for evil if he yields to that temptation. The path always narrows as we advance.

FRODO FULFILS HIS DESTINY

The company now splits into three parts: Merry and Pippin taken by the Orcs; Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli in hot pursuit, hoping to save the young Hobbits; and Frodo and Sam off on their journey toward Mordor. Boromir lies dead and Gandalf is still thought to be dead. At this point, Frodo's quest appears doomed. Thankfully, he has Sam, with his never-to-be-queelled optimism, as companion. Frodo simply accepts the near certainty of failure, but nevertheless, moves forward toward Mordor. This is his task and he will do it, regardless of the consequences for himself. He only hates that Sam is forced to accept the same fate.

Much of Frodo's story from this point has been told in the previous two chapters: The Path of Tragic Failure (Gollum) and The Path of Love (Sam). We watched how Frodo's kindness brought Sméagol (Gollum's original personality) into consciousness, and Sméagol and Gollum battled for control of the personality. For a while, Sméagol was in the ascendent and did everything he could to help Frodo (even if it meant also helping the "nasty Hobbit" Sam). But when Frodo was forced to trick Sméagol so that Faramir's men could take him alive, Gollum convinced Sméagol that even Frodo must die. We know that Frodo was saving his life, but to Sméagol/Gollum, it was treachery.

Gollum then led Frodo and Sam into the great she-Spider Shelob's lair, confident that She

would devour them, as she had so many before. Afterwards, Gollum could pick through the carcasses and take the Ring for himself. Frodo's bravery at first drove Shelob away, but then she came back and stung Frodo into seeming death. Sam stabbed Shelob and drove her away for good. Afterwards, heartsick, convinced Frodo was dead, Sam himself took the Ring in order to try and complete the quest. When he found that Frodo was not dead, he rescued Frodo (with a song! Tom Bombadil taught them well) and the two Hobbits moved on to the last stages of their journey. Finally on Mount Doom, when the moment came to throw the Ring into the volcano, Frodo was unable to relinquish it. Its hold on him had grown too strong, as it was for everyone who ever carried it. He cried out that "I have come, but I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!"¹⁹ Gollum then fulfilled his tragic destiny, biting off Frodo's finger and falling into the volcano with the Ring.

Sometimes, in order to finish a great task, it is necessary to sacrifice a part of ourselves.

All that we have told before. And now, just like that Sauron's kingdom comes to an end. His mighty tower falls, the Great Gate falls, all fall down, as if they were only the toys of a child, and the child had grown weary of this game.

Ultimately that is what all of Sauron's plans are: a child's game, in this case an evil child's game. Often, when we finally complete our task, we find that all that we struggled with now seems only an illusion, only a house of cards. We can no longer remember why it was all so hard.

And Frodo is Frodo again, as he has not been since he has carried the burden of the Ring. Sam

¹⁹III,226.

is overjoyed to see his master finally at peace, but then sad that he has nothing to bind Frodo's mangled hand. Frodo is filled with compassion for Gollum, the compassion only one Ring-bearer can feel for another. "But for him, Sam, I could not have not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him! For the Quest is achieved, and now all is over. I am glad you are here with me. Here at the end of all things, Sam."²⁰

But while this is the end of Sauron's reign, it is not "the end of all things." Strider/Aragorn is crowned King Elessar of Gondor, and weds Arwen Evenstar, to rule in peace and prosperity for one hundred twenty years. After the celebration of the wedding, when the Hobbits are ready to return to the Shire, Queen Arwen has a great gift for Frodo: since she has chosen to live as a mortal with Aragorn, she gives Frodo her place on the ship that will take the Elves across the Sea to the Undying Lands. But before he goes, we need to look at Frodo's return to the Shire in order to see how Frodo has been changed by his quest.

AFTER THE END OF THE QUEST

We have seen in the Chapter on The Path of Curiosity how Merry and Pippin took the lead in the Battle of Bywater, in which the Hobbits regained control of the Shire from Sharkey's men. During the battle, Frodo remains above the fray, his only admonition being that they must not slay any Hobbits, even if they have become collaborators. And during the battle, he prevents the Hobbits from killing any of their enemies who throw down their weapons. With the battle won, it is finally time to confront the leader of the ruffians: Sharkey.

²⁰III,228.

And who do they find when they meet Sharkey: Saruman! Saruman, who, even in defeat, gloats over how he has destroyed their lovely village. Frodo tells him sternly to leave and never return, but the other Hobbits thirst for blood and want to kill him. Saruman turns as always to his twisted tongue, warning them that he still has power and any who kill him will be cursed, and his blood on the Shire will curse it forever. Only Frodo has no fear of Saruman. He tells the other Hobbits that Saruman's only remaining power lies in his ability to make them believe his lies. But, nevertheless, they aren't to harm Saruman. "It is useless to meet revenge with revenge: it will heal nothing."²¹ He again bids Saruman to be on his way.

Saruman calls Wormtongue to follow him, then, as he passes Frodo, pulls out a hidden knife and stabs Frodo. To no avail, as Frodo is still wearing chain-mail. Even this is not enough for Frodo to allow the others to kill Saruman. He says: "He was great once, of a noble kind that we should not dare to raise our hands against. He is fallen and his cure is beyond us; but I would still spare him, in the hope that he may find it."²² Even Saruman is stunned by Frodo's words, telling him "you are wise, and cruel. You have robbed my revenge of sweetness, and now I must go hence in bitterness, in debt to your mercy. I hate it and you!"²³

Frodo now sees as deeply as Galadriel. He can look deep inside Saruman and see what once was there, what might still be there if only Saruman could lay aside his arrogance and his cruelty. And Saruman, like Boromir before him, cannot stand to be seen as he is

²¹III,303.

²²III,303.

²³III,303.

and was and still could be, preferring the face he chooses to present to the world.

With that, he turns on his heel to leave. When Wormtongue hesitantly starts to follow him, Frodo tells Grima Wormtongue that he knows of no evil that he has done him, and that he may remain until he feels ready to leave. Saruman laughs at the idea that Wormtongue is guiltless and tells everyone that Wormtongue killed Lotho, the Hobbit who collaborated with Sharkey's men to rule the Shire. When Wormtongue reminds Saruman that he did the killing at his insistence, Saruman laughs and kicks him in the face as he lies before him on the ground. This is too much: Wormtongue snaps, draws a knife, and slits Saruman's throat. Instantly three Hobbits pull their bows and kill him, thus bringing an end to the last remaining villains of the *Lord of the Rings*.

As the Hobbits begin the restoration of the Shire, Frodo willingly goes into seclusion, writing the history of his quest, much as Bilbo had before him. To the villagers, who have heard nothing but vague rumors of the goings-on that happened in the great world, Merry and Pippin, who led the fight against Sharkey's men, become heroes. And Sam, too, though he is too modest to notice. But Frodo is overlooked by the villagers, since they have no way to understand someone such as Frodo has become.

Frodo's fate is inevitable. People recognize warriors and kings, people who can strut before them. It is much more difficult to recognize greatness in quiet dignity. And few, if any, can understand what it means to carry darkness inside in order to protect others. And though Sam feels badly for Frodo, by this time, it would not even occur to Frodo that he should be recognized for his deeds. And if he was, he wouldn't welcome the recognition. His task is now to record what has happened for the future.

For Frodo has been wounded for all time, in part by the blade of the Lord of the Nazgûls, in larger part, simply by bearing the burden of the Ring. There is no home left in Middle Earth for Frodo. He has looked too deeply into the face of darkness. Darkness has passed inside him, and until he can bring lightness out of that dark, he will remain wounded. Somehow he has to find a way back to the world of nature he found in Tom Bombadil's little world, though he has passed far from Bombadil's reign. Just as Tom sang of the world that was and at least for him always would remain, Frodo has to discover a song within himself, a song that can sing of a new world to come.

At the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo has not yet found a way to heal that wound. He takes passage with Bilbo and Gandalf and the Elves on the ship that will take them to the Undying Lands, where he will live forever, but be no more at peace than he is in Middle Earth. Frodo's destiny, like that of Jesus and Buddha, is to bear the burden for others until they are able to bear it for themselves.