

ESOTERICISM AND FREEMASONRY

By Mark Stavish

Introduction

The history of Free and Accepted Masonry is the history of an initiatic, quasi-esoteric order seeking to find, and in many instances, deny itself. While many esoteric organizations, particularly those of Rosicrucian, Martinist, and Knights Templar extraction, claim an esoteric current within Freemasonry, and many conspiracy theories abound stating the existence of occult teachings in the 32nd and 33rd Degrees, Masons themselves are more often than not ignorant of such claims. While it can be suggested that they are simply playing some game of esoteric possum, it is more likely that the theorists are wrong, and the occultists are exhibiting wishful thinking.

Freemasonry has all of the hallmarks of an esoteric organization, and many genuine and fraudulent organizations have sought to recruit members from within its ranks for their own purposes. However, within two generations of the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England, it was stated that esotericism had waned within the fraternity's ranks, giving justification in some circles to the formation of the various rites, orders, and societies that sprang-up in the second half of the 18th century giving rise to the numerous rites, orders, and societies that would struggle for the control of Freemasonry by offering 'higher degree' initiations said to contain the secrets of Alchemy, Qabala, Hermeticism, and ritual magic.

Less than a century later this process would repeat itself, but instead of new Masonic rites, Freemasonry became the hunting ground for members for the new, revived, and semi-revived Martinist, Rosicrucian, Templar, Co-Masonry, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Ordo Templi Orientis, and related societies. Claiming to offer what Freemasonry had promised but failed to deliver, their ranks swelled to the breaking point — and break many of them did.

From the 1930's until his death in 1989, the writings of Manly P. Hall expound the fundamental principle that Free and Accepted Masonry is a society of men dedicated to a spiritual ideal that is essentially esoteric, occult, and deeply spiritual in

nature. Mr. Hall's books are suggested reading in most lodges in the United States, yet his fundamental premise is dismissed or its actual implications outright ignored by Masonic readers. At least one Masonic source states that while Mr. Hall was a Freemason, he wrote his books *before* joining the Craft, in a weak attempt to dismiss them as being authoritative. It is important to note that Mr. Hall is made a Mason by Masonic authorities *because* of his writings, and not in spite of them.

At the dawning of the 21st century, Freemasonry is at a critical crossroads. With an aging membership, the closing and merging of lodges on an unprecedented scale, and projected deaths of entire Jurisdictions within the next 20 years, Masonry must ask itself the great existential question of why does it exist?

For some the answer is quite obvious. Masonry is a fraternal, charitable, and philosophic organization that clothes itself in ancient rituals and teaches a moral philosophy through the use of symbols. It is often stated that Masonic charities contribute \$1 million a day to charity, the Knights Templar Eye Bank, and Shriner's burn centers among the most well known. As for fraternity, no organization in the world can offer the level of business, social, and political contacts that Freemasonry can. Philosophical? Well, sort of.

The moral philosophy of Freemasonry that is designed to make 'good men better' is well known for its honesty and uprightness. Yet the vast array of ancient symbolism that it is cloaked in is often said to 'veil the truth' rather than 'reveal' it. For obvious reasons, as well as long standing historical ones, Freemasonry has been misunderstood by many outside the Craft, and unfortunately for the same reasons, not understood at all by most within its ranks.

The principle reason for this misunderstanding is simple: while the teachings speak of moral philoso-

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phy born from the Jewish and Christian experience of its members, and expressed for the majority of Masons in the Holy Bible as the Volume of the Sacred Law on their altars and upon which they swear their oath; the symbolism is clearly and distinctly taken from the Natural Philosophy of the Renaissance. A philosophy born of the secret, mystical, albeit 'occult' teachings of Egypt, Israel, Greece, Arabia, and Rome, cloaked under the veneer of the prevailing Christian religions. This Natural Philosophy regarding the practical use of symbols was no better explained, for its time, in the works of Agrippa, Paracelsus, Boehme, Khunrath, and other luminaries of the Hermetic revival, the fountain source of Rosicrucian and Masonic "Enlightenments" that were to follow.

The symbolism of Freemasonry is purely of an esoteric, occult, and deeply mystical nature. It is derived in form and inspiration from the ancient mystery teachings of the Middle East — primarily Jewish mysticism or Qabala- as well as later Hermetic additions, many dating back with little change to ancient Egypt and nearby lands.

Unfortunately few Freemasons understand this, including the much beguiled leadership of the Scottish and York Rites. Lesser practices rites, such as Memphis and Mizraim, various rites of Memphis, and several quasi-Rosicrucian rites are immune to this. Unfortunately, they are all but non-existent in the United States, with a modern revival of the Rite of Memphis being the sole exception on any appreciable scale. In Europe and Australia, the College model of teaching has been adopted requiring members to take several months or even years between each of the Blue Lodge degrees in order to attend classes on the topics of each degree. The policy of making a man a Master Mason in a weekend, or even over three months, such as is done in the United States is shunned. Degrees are actually conferred upon an initiate and not just 'demonstrated' as a sort of mystery-morality play.

Even if European Masons and others are less esoterically inclined than some would like to believe them to be, at least the process of membership training requires a more serious mind and commitment to the Craft as a lifelong ideal than is seen in American Freemasonry as it attempts to replenish itself with any warm body it can find in many instances.

This process of lowered standards both in membership selection, lodge training, and ritual performance — the heart and soul of the *Masonic*

rite — has lead many fine members to leave soon after joining. The philosophy they sought is absent. They are met with blank stares when asking questions regarding the *meaning and use* of the mystic symbols they are presented with on the Tressel Boards.

Meaning — the very essence of philosophy — is absent from the rituals, the symbols, the lodges, and as such — Freemasonry itself. While Freemasonry may always have been some kind of outer court for the recruitment of intelligent, inquisitive, and liberal thinking men for political and religious movements, it has also been the well from which the great Western Esoteric Traditions have sought to find their most promising members.

The reasons for this are simple. As a Freemason, one was already outside the bounds of the law in many countries; knew well how to keep a secret; was inquisitive in mind and courageous in heart, for the rituals drew blood and were done with a seriousness lacking today. But finally, they were sought after because they knew the meaning of symbols and the power of their use in ritual. It is this knowledge and rudimentary understanding of the use of symbols to awaken the mind and stir the soul that demonstrates the seed and flowering of esoteric ideas within Freemasonry.

The Modern Era

Modern humanity faces a crisis of great proportion within its ranks. Young men seek meaning and more and more youth are driven to spirituality than ever before. New religions and spiritual organizations flood the market annually. Yet Freemasonry continues to die.

The great temple buildings that occupied positions of prominence in nearly every community across the United States are being closed down and sold as lodges are merged to accommodate an aging and declining membership, and being replaced with bland, "cookie-cutter" structures devoid of the great mystical symbolism of which Freemasonry is famous. These new temples reflect the *zeitgeist* of the time: efficient, simple, non-distinct, and easily converted to when the function for which they were built is no longer needed. In short, they are devoid of the architectural beauty, strength, and wisdom their predecessors incarnated in brick and stone. Most of the temples built in the last 30 years could just as easily be misconstrued for commercial office space in their design and layout. Given an hour and a moving van, what little

distinctly Masonic characteristics they hold could easily be removed, and within a week, the structured converted into business offices or retail space. They inspire the soul no more than the slab of poured concrete and pasteboard walls that they are.

Despite these obstacles, the future of each life, be it individual or collective, is what we make it. While past choices direct and suggest, they do not dictate future actions and outcomes. Masonry has the opportunity before it to show its true path — and to be a guide stone for thousands of young seekers — if only it would come to terms with what it really is and was meant to be — the custodian of the Mystery Teachings of the Mediterranean world.

Many have said that they have attempted to talk about esoteric and philosophical matters in their lodges only to be chastised, ignored, or even asked to leave. From this a large urn of bitterness has been collected that has turned many young members of the Craft against Freemasonry. They sought the genuinely spiritual and found little more than stale cologne and fish fries.

Unfortunately, they left before they realized what genuine power they have to change what goes inside their lodges, as well as to attract and retain more members of a definite philosophical, even occult slant.

The Secret Key

It is said that one must come to Masonry free of ulterior and mercenary motives, and that they must seek to give, rather than to obtain. For those who would like to see their lodges be a place where esotericism can be spoken of freely, and would like Masonry as a whole to return to some of its more 'philosophical' roots, the following series of exercises are suggested. They are based completely on the most basic of esoteric principles, those being:

- 1) All is Mind. What the individual imagines eventually becomes physical reality.
- 2) Repeated thoughts strengthen towards material manifestation.
- 3) The power of thought is what changes others' thoughts, not persuasion by spoken words or argument.
- 4) Symbols are the language of the soul and the key to genuine interior, spiritual initiation.
- 5) All groups have a group mind, or 'egregore,'

that can be effected by every member of the group. Focused thought, backed by strong emotions, will have the most powerful effect on the group mind.

- 6) Work done under the cover of silence is the most powerful form of esoteric work there is, thus one can change the many — over time.
- 7) The working tools of contacting the "Inner Master" found within each Mason's heart, and used for the perfection of the personality, are: ritual, prayer, and meditation. When these are undertaken, the Work is advanced to a newer level, and the ashlar made smooth.

It is through these three tools of ritual, prayer, and meditation, and only these tools, that the true inner purpose of Freemasonry is understood and accomplished. Everything else is but a shadow, imitation, or suggestion of the Work that is to come.

The Working Tools of the Inner Mason

If symbols are the "language of the soul," and Freemasonry is a society that communicates in symbols, then ritual is its syntax and grammar. When ritual is done poorly the ability to communicate truth is destroyed. When ritual is done well, an inner sublime meaning — a gnosis of direct and personal meaning — is transmitted to the candidate and members.

Prayer is communication with the Inner Master in the special antechamber of our Heart.

Meditation is the secret meaning to the 'Point within the Circle' of the Third Degree that allows each Mason if they so chose, to unite directly and personally with the Sacred Word symbolized by the Bible, and mediate the Pillars of Mercy and Severity within themselves, as seen by the two upright lines.

When we become the still point within the Circle — we can hear the voice of the Grand Architect speaking to our consciousness directly — free of symbols or any external mediator. This is the goal of each Master Mason.

The principle symbol in Western Esotericism is the Qabalistic Tree of Life. This symbol can also be found in the Officers Stations of a Masonic Lodge, as well as in other initiatic and esoteric organization.

By tapping into the symbolic and highly charged spiritual power of this symbol we can bring more

Light into our lodges and start a process that will regenerate Freemasonry within a generation or less.

All that is required is dedication in the face of the inertia that is encountered whenever change is brought to bear; faith in the power of interior and genuine esoteric practices and the power of one to make a difference; and patience, the touchstone of success, as only through confident, loving, and repeated use of techniques such as those about to be discussed, is outer success realized.

However, — and this is critical — just as we seek a Masonic life that is richer and fuller through an understanding and practical application of Masonic symbols and rituals, we must be respectful of those who prefer a more moral and religious interpretation as is traditionally given in lodge. Each must find their own way. Each must respect the Path of others in the pursuit of Enlightenment. In performing these exercises we do not wish to change anyone's mind, or force them into a belief they are uncomfortable with, only to create a condition that allows for a more liberal and open discussion of the original Natural Philosophy that was and is the basis for Masonry, its symbols, rituals, and teachings. It is the environment we seek to change, and not the people within it. They must be, and are FREE, to choose as they feel fit within their hearts.

The Practice

For those of you not familiar with the Tree of Life we suggest you read one or more of the books listed at the end of this article. If you are experienced in working with the symbols of the Tree you will be able to experience progress much more quickly than if you are not. However, regardless of your level of experience in meditative, Qabalistic, Hermetic, or Rosicrucian methods, it will take about 12-18 months of once weekly practice or more before results are sensed. This is a natural process of evolution we are seeking to harmonize with, and not a radical shift, or revolutionary change that will only collapse into itself after a short time.

The Tree of Life and the Lodge

The Lodge represents a perfect macrocosm of the Universe just as the Tree of Life represents the same. The Lodge however is of a specific and material nature, with its officers stations marking the course of the sun across the sky in man's daily labors. The Tree demonstrates the interconnectedness of all things, the path of the creative energies in Creation — or Mezla — and the

harmonizing ideas of form, energy, and consciousness as symbolized by the three Pillars qabalists call Boaz, Yakin, and Zohar, and Masons know as Strength, Wisdom, and Beauty.

The center of the Tree is the place where matter, energy, and consciousness meet in perfect harmony, just as the altar is the place where the Three Great Lights of the Masonic tradition are displayed when a lodge is open.

Simple Version

- 1) Imagine a vast Tree of Life forming sphere by sphere from Keter to Yesod above the Temple.
- 2) When Yesod is reached, imagine it as a brilliant sphere of firm, solid light around the Temple building or lodge room.
- 3) Think of this sphere as the collective unconscious of the lodge and its members.
- 4) Sense the great influx of Light from above as it flows towards this sphere, cleansing it, strengthening it, purifying it, so that each member may better understand the Masonic Craft in their own way.
- 5) Imagine now that this light forms a brilliant focal point that pushed downwards, as well as inwards towards the Altar, bathing it in a brilliant golden light that in turn radiates back to fill the lodge with a luminous light.
- 6) Have this light be filled with feelings of love, harmony, and a quickening sense of the deeper spiritual meaning behind Masonic symbolism.
- 7) Hold this image for as long as you like and then say, "So Mote it Be!" and let it go with a confidence that all that is best is done.

Intermediate Version

- 1) Proceed as above, but include the colors of the Tree in your visualization.
- 2) After forming a brilliant luminous violet sphere for Yesod, imagine a second smaller Tree forming above the altar. This Tree is a channel for those forces just imagined and invoked, so that an even more focused energy can enter the Lodge mind.
- 3) In the center of this second Tree, at Tiphareth, imagine the compass and square in brilliant clarity and form, transmitting the

secrets of inner illumination to the members.

- 4) Imagine a brilliant Eye in a Triangle in Keter, at the crown of the Tree, sending out silent thoughts of Love and Cosmic Wisdom to the members of the lodge.
- 5) In Yesod see a clear, perfect ashlar of human perfection, as the driving image behind our collective work as Freemasons.
- 6) Sense these energies entering the physical altar and spreading to the physical world itself, as the entire building and each member in it is Malkooth.
- 7) Hold this image for as long as you like and then say, "So Mote it Be!" and let it go with confidence that all that is best is done.

Advanced Version

- 1) Imagine the Tree of Life in the East behind the Master's Chair.
- 2) The Middle Pillar should go from the ceiling to the floor, with the side pillars flowing through each of the adjacent officers' chairs.
- 3) Visualize the Lightening Flash.
- 4) Malkooth in the Tree should correspond to the actual physical feet of the officers as they sit in their chairs.
- 5) Imagine vast towering images, of brilliant, luminous figures, archetypal in their form and purity standing behind, or surrounding the officers, overshadowing them, gently guiding and directing the lodge work and its members.
- 6) Imagine and sense these personified energies as ever present in the lodge, and as the actual psychic force behind the rituals of the Order and the inner work of the Lodge.
- 7) Hold this image for as long as you like and then say, "So Mote it Be!" and let it go with confidence that all that is best is done.

Advanced Version Two

- 1) Imagine the Tree of Life on the floor of the Temple, with Keter in the East in the Master's Station, and Yesod in the West with the Station.
- 2) The Master, Senior Warden, and Junior Warden represent and mediate the energies of Holy Upper Trinity of the Tree of Life, and as such, exist on a raised platform which

they must descend from to enter the world of duality.

- 3) The Senior Deacon, Junior Deacon are the forces of Geburah and Chesed.
- 4) The Altar, before which no human stands, is the Divine within each of us. The true Invisible Master (Mason) within.
- 5) The Inner Guard and Tyler are Hod and Netzach.
- 6) Yesod is the candidate brought forth for Initiation or the general membership for Yesod is the collection of all that goes on before it, just as the Initiate receives the work of the entire lodge, and each member is blessed by the ritual work the officers perform in execution of their lodge duties.
- 7) Malkooth is the physical temple itself as a reflection of the Divine Plan, and is the outer world, when representing humanity's fragile and corruptible state.
- 8) The symbols on their aprons must be imagined in brilliant glowing colors. Vibrant sense of towering archetypal beings surround each officer like a luminous mist, or holographic image, and infuse them with their sacred power, wisdom, and harmony with each other ideal presented.

This method is among the most difficult as the various positions of the lodge officers change according to the degree being worked, and their correspondence to the energies and archetypes they represent do not always match their location on the Tree and in the Temple. However, the pattern of the Tree of Life in the Masonic temple is clear to anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of Qabala, and certain details will have to be worked out on an individual basis.

A third and final method would be to perceive each of the officers as representing an astrological planet, as well as its corresponding liberal art and science as is decreed in the teachings of the Second Degree. In this case, the Master would be Saturn, or 'Master of the Temple' as he is called in other systems, the Tyler Yesod, or "Guardian of the Threshold," and the membership Malkooth as in the above. The invisible energies of Kether and the zodiac (Hokmah) would be imagined as existing in the East, as well as directly above the temple, and the zodiac as a ring of light around the temple delineating the outer most limits of visible and

invisible creation.

If done daily the net effect of this meditation will be seen within six to nine months, and within twelve to eighteen a significant shift in the intangible qualities of the lodge will be noticed. If this is done consciously while lodge is in session, all the better, especially if three Masons can perform it together, even if in private outside of lodge. If this is done, then Monday and Wednesday nights will best serve the operation, as well as periods just before and including the full moon. There are astrological reasons for these suggestions, and remember, astrology is one of the seven arts and sciences taught in traditional Freemasonry.

It is not enough just to have the symbols. To be a Master, one must also know what to do with them.

The Future Masonic Revival

As stated, Freemasonry stands at a critical crossroads for its future as an effective and meaningful organization. As the world enters into a period of complex business, political, and social change, young men and women now more than ever are searching for both spiritual meaning and avenues of service — Freemasonry and its sister organization the Order of the Eastern Star offer these opportunities.

However, the current generation is better educated, more mobile, and less tolerant of stodgy, self-defeating, empty tradition than previous ones. For youth to enter into Masonry, Masonry must enter into a new phase of youthful thinking, feeling, and action that fulfills the needs of its potential members.

Recent studies have shown that the "Twenty Something" generation and the one immediately behind it are among the most group oriented, charitably active, and spiritually conscious in recent decades. They consider themselves 'spiritual' but not religious, thus making Freemasonry an ideal choice for their innate spiritual needs, but only if the current leadership understands, accepts, and can fulfill those needs for inner depth and experiences of a mystical nature that new members require, and under the guidance of more experienced members.

If Freemasonry does not accept this new reality and adjust its practices either on an individual lodge, jurisdiction, or rite basis, it will fail in its mission as a protector, advocate, and alternative source for spiritual liberty and cease to have relevance within two decades and will then be dead

within three or four. The work of generations will be lost when the world will be most in need of the Light Masonry has to offer. For Darkness, there can be no greater victory than this.

Those who say that esotericism is gone from Freemasonry are partially correct. However, it is also clear that esotericism is an intangible quality that is the responsibility, more often than not, of a dedicated corps of individuals that keep it alive and revive it when it wanes, rather than a constant stream of consciousness. Freemasonry has always been an organization of individuals, who more often than not are leaders in their communities, professions, and countries, who come together to serve a higher ideal. It is the responsibility of each member to assume the mantle of leadership within their lodge, even if it is a 'quiet' form of leadership whose influence is felt over time, rather than over a single term in office. If you seek to have a more esoteric lodge, then simply be more esoteric. Esotericism is the inner aspect of one's spiritual teachings, and as such, something we do, to change who we are, and what we are becoming, and not something we sit around and discuss like a "Book of the Month Club." We need not ask permission to be more esoteric — we simply have to be it — and let Nature do the rest.

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(Continued on page XX)

The image of Diana is said to fall down from Jupiter (Acts 19.35) because Diana or Venus is exalted, in Pisces ruled by Jupiter. Her emanations

from the Great Sea pass from Pisces to Aries. [To be continued with Part V c,d,e and f.] ☉

Blackmail

continued from page 42

proverb that the child is father to the man, is just as true today as centuries ago; and the child who has been threatened and coerced into obedience grows up into a man, or woman, who coerces — or else, who submits to coercion because the habit has become ingrained. The child who has never been threatened or bribed, grows up into a wholly different and grander type of citizen.

Our lower nature is a blackmailer by instinct. It threatens inconvenience unless we yield to it. All other arguments failing, it proceeds to terrify us with the threat that we shall be ostracized as

cranks by our immediate acquaintances and by society at large unless we submit to its impositions. But whoever yields to that threat has descended to the plane on which all other threats are powerful; one concession leads inevitably to another and all liberty of thought or action vanishes, obliterated by the tyranny of popular opinion and the clamor of the lower senses.

Like begetting like, it follows that whoever seeks to enforce his will by threats, himself becomes amenable to threats. ☉

Esotericism and Freemasonry

continued from page 48

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Victories

continued from page 20

commendation to all lightworkers for unending service and devotion "beyond the call."

Congratulations to all with Great Blessings in Knowing All Heart Desires are Now Fulfilled on all levels. Selah, it is Done! ☉

— Intergalactic Council &
Beloved Ascended Master St. Germain

Into the Moonless Night

One early evening of a Sun strewn day.
The day's business transacted, satisfied,
The night's unfoldment
anticipated.

In timeless twilight,
unattached to distant outcomes,
Into the Moonless night we go.

by Alan Robert Ellis