

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
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#### **SOME ASPECTS OF RITUAL IN FREEMASONRY**

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Ritual or elements of ritual have probably been with Mankind from the beginning of the emergence of Man. At first consideration it is of importance to develop an understanding of the nature of ritual. The definition from the dictionary that seems to fit the best is "a set form or system of rites, religious or otherwise." (1) This leads us to the definition of the word rite. The most appropriate definition

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is "a ceremony or formal, solemn act, observance or procedure in accordance with prescribed rule or custom, as in religious use." (1) We can relate, as Freemasons, to the second definition. Understanding is yet another matter

In our century we have experienced an interesting and dramatic illustration of the use of ritual. Early in 1932 at Bad-Tolz in Bavaria the SS leadership school was founded. At the back of the mind of Heinrich Himmler, the creator of the SS, existed an interesting collection of theories which were partly from his Roman Catholic background. Himmler respected the discipline exercised by the Society of Jesus or Jesuits. At this time, however, he was strongly motivated by the pseudo-Teutonic mythology of blood and earth. Also, he was strongly impressed by the tradition of the Teutonic knights. A splendid old castle at Wewelsburg, in a forest area in Westphalia, was selected to serve as a type of SS monastery. Each member devoted himself to a ritual of spiritual exercises mainly aimed at the development of mental concentration. The service statutes and spiritual exercises prescribed by Loyola formed the pattern that Himmler attempted to emulate. To the end the central core of the discipline was absolute obedience as the prime dictum.

Himmler created a research centre called Ahnenerbe (Ancestral Heritage) to investigate the roots of the Nordic stock and also to develop the reasons for the natural superiority of the Nordic stock. (2)

The result was a solid core of highly indoctrinated soldiers who were thoroughly trained to support the Third Reich at all costs. In the light of history the weakness of this approach is evident. The point is that at the time and TO THOSE PEOPLE this ritualistic approach was very realistic. One cannot help but ruminate on the possibility of being twenty years old, not having a job, shoes or a place to sleep. From this vantage point it becomes easier to imagine how easy it would have been to be recruited as a member of the fledgling S.S.

The purpose is not to rail against either Nazi Germany or the S.S.. The purpose is to begin to put some ramifications of ritual into perspective.

Ritual also provides an element of social intercourse between humans. The process of a ritual with others reinforces the energy that is created. This is experienced by the individuals who are involved in lodge proceedings, especially when the ritual work is done well.

A deviant concept is that of habit. A dictionary definition of the word habit is (3) "a thing done often and hence, usually done easily; practice, custom". The practical difference between the words "ritual" and "habit" is not always

clear. In a most general way it would seem that a ritual is a procedure, which is usually vocalized or at least partially vocalized in which some end or benefit is expected. On the other hand, a habit is usually a procedure that an individual is involved in that is a matter of convenience in some way that usually is not done or performed to achieve a specific goal.

Through the use of Ockham's Razor we can see a dramatic difference in the semantic implications of the two words. Ritual is a concept in which there is a specific and rigidly controlled physical and verbal routine in which there is a desired end result. Habit on the other hand can be a controlled and at time a verbal routine which is not done to achieve a specific end result. It is to be recognized that all humans, even in their every day lives, utilize habits and at times even a ritual.

From our vantage point in history it is impossible to really appreciate societal ramifications of great antiquity. So many of our conclusions are based on no facts, incorrect facts, distorted facts or just plain lies. For many years it was concluded by the "wise ones" that electricity was a relative newcomer to science. Interestingly enough jars containing powder were found in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt that upon a more thorough investigation revealed themselves to be what we would now call Voltaic cells.

The existence of these Voltaic cells now made it possible for science to accept the fact that

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repeatedly it has been found that at least in ancient Egypt electroplating existed as many curia have indicated. One of the interesting facets of contemporary science is that it tends to ignore evidence that does not concur with "accepted scientific theory". The point is that we now can appreciate quite clearly what SOME of the applications for these Voltaic cells might have been.

Numerous books have been written on the subject of Stonehenge. In these books, the authors propound a number of interesting philosophies regarding the nature of Stonehenge and its use or uses. One interesting book is "Stonehenge: An Ancient Masonic Temple" by Russell A. Herner. (4) The idea that Stonehenge was built some four-thousand years ago by a Masonic organization seems at first to be a bit far fetched. At this point we should consider just what we really know about life some four-thousand years ago. No records have come down to us in a form that would indicate specifics of their life style.

Archaeology as such is the study of ancient civilizations and peoples. Beyond studying artifacts and other physical evidence it is most difficult to understand how the people functioned and the exact nature of their social structure. Likewise, there is no person today who can tell us what it was like to live in the time of the creation and use of Stonehenge. In fact, society has changed so much that it is difficult to imagine what it was like to live in an ancient society such as that existed in England during the time that Stonehenge was built.

To say that Stonehenge was used as a Masonic Temple is a statement that is difficult to understand. That is not to say that this was not the case. Rather, it is to say that from our view point it is most difficult to penetrate the mists of antiquity to put this matter in proper perspective.

However, it can be said that Stonehenge was built in a manner that it is easy to perceive its use in Masonic ritual as we know it today. Unfortunately the privacy of the Masonic ritual and ceremonies is such that it is most unusual to

have glimpses into the past. Many of the glimpses that we do have are by means of exposes of one form or another. At best, these exposes are not always fair and/or accurate.

We do have an understanding of some elements of the enigma of ritual. From time immemorial, mankind has used ritual to accomplish specific things. One of these things has been the communication, from generation to generation specific teachings. The purity of the ritual was important so that a minimum of distortion of the original truths would be propounded through the generations. Originally before the invention of the printing press, documents were hand-written on parchment. In itself this would indicate that there was a possibility of changes through rewriting.

Classically, ritual also has been a means of "taming the mind". Ritual learned and memorized is said to have the power of impressing the mind of the learner with the concepts of the subject matter learned. This was especially true during the vast period of time in which most men were uneducated or at best semi-educated. Even during this period of time it is evident that the creators of the rituals that we are familiar with today, were either men of the nobility or the Church.

The chanting of mantras in the Far Eastern religions has for centuries been used for a number of purposes. One of these purposes is to subdue the passions of the flesh and permit the chanter to focus his thinking and energy on a thought or subject of his choice. The use of a mantra definitely would be considered as a ritual in that a specific goal is sought as an end result of the ritual.

Without doubt the critical factor in this consideration is conscious or subconscious intention. It is merely an observable difference that may or may not have a significance to the individual.

It is necessary to observe that at times ritual is accompanied by flickering candles, rhythmic repetition of a mantra, passage or memorized passage. At times bells or chimes are used to instill a lilt to

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the proceedings. To enhance the effect, incense is sometimes burned which provides an additional dramatic influence. Since these techniques are consciously selected it is to be concluded that they are used with a ritual rather than a habit.

Another effect that has been used, particularly among primitive people originally, is that of a drumbeat. This is particularly interesting when the drumbeat is synchronized with the beat of the heart. As the drumbeat varies from the normal heart rhythm, the beat tends to follow the drumbeat and maintain synchronism. The range of this possible synchronism has not (to the knowledge of the author) been scientifically established. It would seem that this synchronism is used to enhance the impact of the ritual on the devotee.

Drumbeat augmentation of the heart rate is used to enhance the effect of the experience. It is impossible to miss the connection of ritual which is enhanced by rock music. Also, it is obvious that there can at times be a very powerful sexual relationship. Some of the drumbeats of rock music are very sexual in their rhythm.

Ritual as practiced in lodges of Freemasonry varies over a great range. During the working of the Lodge it is difficult not to experience definite feelings depending on the harmony in the lodge and the perfection of the work. In this

respect the individual relationship to the ritual is a very critical relationship. The language of the Masonic ritual is archaic to the point of being obscure at times. This seems really to matter very little in the working of the Lodge. It is to be understood that these effects vary in a great range depending on a myriad of parameters that the working is involved in.

It is of great interest that the total understanding of the working is not always necessary for the participants to generate the desired effect. This effect must be considered in metaphysical terms since this certainly is the case. In this context the term metaphysical is used to denote a result which is beyond the realm of extension.

In the modern setting it is most uncommon to have the Lodge members participate in singing songs relating to Masonic subjects. This, from all indications, was not always the case. In the book "The True Masonic Chart, Or Hieroglyphic Monitor" by RW. Jeremy L. Cross, published in 1860, a number of Masonic songs are provided. With titles such as the Entered Apprentice's Song, the Fellow Craft's Song, the Master's Song and ode for Grand Visitation we find that at the time of the middle eighteen hundreds songs were actually sung during the working of the Lodge.

Masonic lectures are an interesting facet of ritual. The lectures are universally beautiful and provide as much guidance and wisdom today as when they were originally composed. In addition to providing guidance and wisdom for the benefit of the candidates they provided a platform for the presenter to demonstrate his prowess in delivering memorized work. There is a recognizable tendency to consider that a brother who finds it easy to commit large works to memory as somehow a "better Mason." This is probably a natural reaction of respect on the part of those who do not find memorization an easy task.

Somehow it is easy to imagine that a Priest of Stonehenge (or whatever he was called) would ad lib through the ritual. There being only a minimum of documents at the time it was necessary to depend on the memory to provide the required material. It was only after the invention of the printing press that it really became practical to have documents on a basis greater than one-by-one.

One of the sad elements of Freemasonry is that there are so few records that clearly spell out accurately just what the ancient ritual was. It is most probable that at the time when Masonry changed from operative to speculative that much wisdom of the ancient world was infused into what we now call Freemasonry. Today it is impossible for us to imagine the extent of the knowledge that has been lost in the process of what we now call "developing civilization.". The greatest Temple in the world is the large

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pyramid of Gizeh.(5) By means of interpretations of the corridors of this pyramid it has been possible to gain some understanding of the wide ranging wisdom of it's makers, the Hyksos. But, in the final analysis it is completely a matter of speculation as to the extent of their wisdom.

Ritual has the power to, at times, put us in connection with forces which seem not to come from ourselves. That these forces exist, every man has experienced in some way or another One common form of ritual is prayer or as it is at times expressed in Freemasonry, supplication.

At some point it becomes necessary to deal with a basic fact. That fact is what the individual really wants from Freemasonry. Most ordinarily this is not an easy question. In this case it is necessary to deal with this basic fact before

the individual role of the function of ritual is understood. High on the list of possible elements of the basic fact is that of self-improvement. Most of us recognize our individual lack of perfection and some of us consciously desire to improve ourselves. Also high on the list of possible elements of the basic fact is the desire for harmony. Primarily this means a state of internal mental harmony but it also is involved with harmony with our fellow beings.

In the progress of civilization at each age, the people are impressed with how much more difficult life is now compared to what is used to be. This has some possible validity but it is wise to view this matter in perspective. It cannot be denied that life as we know it in the late twentieth century is much more complex and demanding largely due to the fantastic proliferation of scientific hardware. At times we tend to lose sight of what is really going on. The basic facts of life have not changed since the earliest days of mankind. Today it is tragically easy to become lost in the abundance of "toys". Each of us has a requirement to determine our individual place in the grand scheme of things and then to pursue it.

Some things in Freemasonry are confusing. The "science" that is repeatedly referred to in our ritual is keyed to a period of time of at least five-hundred years ago. What we are overlooking is the fascinating fact that the real principles of science have not changed. The physical and hardware type of science has become infinitely more sophisticated. This does have a very real meaning for us, but, this is not what we are dealing with in our ritual.

Quite possibly the real teachings of Freemasonry, et al, are involved with the most central and real facets of our individual lives. Living up to the principles of the Bible are hard in this era. To "love one another is difficult on a day-by-day basis. To love oneself in the midst of moral "standards" which we are now told (not from within Freemasonry) are "normal" is also difficult. Perhaps the ritual is a means to remind us each on a day-by-day basis of our obligations so we can constantly realign our thoughts in the desired direction. One of the very great difficulties is that to be meaningful and effective we must deal with these matters on a conscious basis. This means that it is not enough to just drift along. The ritual should be a means by which each of us can daily (or more often) consciously realign our thinking according to our principles.

To love one another is meaningless until we as individuals can truly love ourselves. The beginning step in loving ourselves is to conform to our individual set of moral principles. This again brings us back to the ritual. The matter of dealing with ritual on an every-day basis cannot but help bring our set of principles into clearer focus.

With ritual it is possible to focus a totality of energy on the presentation of the ritual without really dealing with the content of the ritual. It is easy to analyze the working of the ritual to a point that we completely lose sight of the point of the ritual. There are many rituals involved in Freemasonry. The interesting thing is that each and every one of the Freemasonic rituals is saying identically the same thing. At times the setting approach is different but the central theme is always the same.

It matters not the particular ritual that the individual is involved in. The important thing is to open the individual heart and recognize the good and beauty of the ritual. Perhaps each one of us can

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become a little less judgmental, a little less rigid in our thinking and most of

all more loving. Being loving in the final analysis is the most central key of all. For it is good to go forth and love one another as ye love yourselves.

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#### REFERENCES

- (1) Webster's New World Dictionary, second college edition, 1984, p 1229
- (2) Gestapo, Roger Manwell, Ballantine Books, 1969, p38
- (3) Webster's New World Dictionary, second college edition, 1984p 262
- (4) Stonehenge: An Ancient Masonic Temple, Russell A. Herner
- (5) The Large Pyramid of Gizeh, David Davidson, 1924

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#### POT-POURRI

As a blank page should be considered an anathma to a Lodge such as ours we are adding this collection from various sources

#### TROWEL

The Quatuor Coronati Lodge England) Summons for 10 September 1992 included:

Q. It is to me a matter of some surprise that, among the working tools upon which we moralize in the ceremonies of the three Craft degrees, no mention is made of the trowel and yet it must have been in use among the operative masons of the Middle Ages. Is there some reason for its omission?

A. One would hesitate to give a reason for the present-day absence of mention of the trowel, but let it be said that it is still very much alive under some of our sister Constitutions and is retained in Bristol as a working tool of the Master Mason. It is also worthy of note that it had a place in the early exposures of Freemasonry and must therefore be presumed to have figured in the workings of the early lodges on which those exposures would have been based. It was included in some of the diagrams which represented the contemporary drawings which at first had to be chalked on the floor of the lodge-room (and later cleaned off by the candidate) and which afterwards developed into 'floor-cloths' and then into the tracing boards which we know today.

It would be difficult to arrive at a date for the trowel's removal from the forms of ritual and the lectures generally in use. Preston was continuing to mention it in 1801 so it may have been one of the 'casualties' of the Union of 1813. Among known instances of its use is that the Inner Guard was at one time provided with a trowel and that the Entered Apprentice wore it as a badge. In lodges in Scotland and America, among others, the trowel is among the tools of a Master Mason, its symbolic use being to spread the cement of brotherly love. In Scandinavia it is worn as a breast jewel and it is included in the jewel which is peculiar to the Pilgrim Lodge of London, which works an old German ritual.

Of course, it has quite recently been reintroduced to the English Craft as the collar jewel of the Charity Steward, and Royal Arch masons, Royal and Select Masters and members of the Royal Order of Scotland will know of its place in their workings.

- Frederick Smyth

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#### PILLARS Quatuor Coronati Lodge No.2076

Q. Were the Pillars of Solomon's Temple made of brass, or bronze?

A. The Hebrew word which appears in connection with the story of the Temple Pillars in I Kings, chap vii, is 'nehoshet' and it is translated 'brass' in the Geneva Bible, and in the Authorized Version

'Brass is an alloy consisting mainly if not exclusively of copper and zinc; in

its older use the term

was applied rather to alloys of copper and tin, now known as bronze.

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The brass of the Bible was probably bronze, and so also brass of later times, until the distinction between zinc and tin clearly recognized'. Ency. Brit. 14th Edn.).

The use of bronze is believed to date back before 2,000 B.C., in Egypt and the Near East, and it seems probable, therefore, that despite the use of the word brass in biblical account, the Pillars were made of bronze.

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#### PRAYER

Southern California Research Lodge

While serving as classroom director in the Long Beach, California, Scottish Rite Bodies in the 70s, the Almoner at the time was Frank W. Brejcha, Master of his lodge in Oklahoma in 1915. He gave me a prayer that I understood was by him but later one of the members gave me a Dear Abby or Ann Landers letter showing it composed by a Roman Catholic priest, I believe it was. Anyway, he requested it be used at his funeral. And I used it many a time as the invocation in the classroom. Be that it may, it was impressive, at least to me, and believe that you would appreciate it, maybe even considering using it.

"Help me be a good sport in this game of life. I don't ask for an easy place in the line-up. Put me anywhere you need me. I only ask that I can give you 100% of all I have.

"If the hard drives seem to come my way, I thank you for the compliment. Help me remember that you never send a player more trouble than he can handle.

"Help me, oh Lord, to accept the bad breaks as part of the game. And may I always play the game on the square, no matter what the others do. Help me study the Book so I'll know the rules.

"Finally, God, if the natural turn of events goes against me and I'm benched for sickness or old age, please help me to accept that as part of the game too. Keep me from whimpering or squealing that I was framed or that I got a raw deal.

"And, when I finish the final inning, I ask for no laurels. All I want is to believe in my heart that I played as well as I could and that I didn't let you down. Amen."

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