



Trestleboard

April 2010

Culver City Foshay No. 467 F. & A. M.



FROM THE EAST

I would like to start this Trestleboard by saying thank you to the Lodge and Brethren for a wonderful Memorial Service held for my Grandfather, Lt. Com., George Bernard Dilley, Sr., and I am especially thankful for the efforts of our dear brothers Richard Pierce and Robert Leggio. Your hard work made the Memorial a success! Additionally, I would like to thank each and every one of you who were present to support the service. Lastly, I have to give a special thank you to our Job's Daughters who really took it home. I was so moved by their presentation and I can see now how important it is for us to support and promote the Job's Daughters in who they are and what they represent. It is with much pride that I compliment the work that they have done.

Next topic: Our stated meeting nights.

I wanted to make mention in our Trestleboard that we are working hard to improve our communications to our members and to do this, we are working on finding ways to create an email list and we also hope to include a menu in future Trestleboards so that we can know ahead of time, what's on the menu for our dinner. I have to say that we have the best meals of any Lodge that I know and we owe our thanks to our brother George Wollin for that. He and I will be planning out the year and what will be served and we will be sure to include it in the Trestleboard for your planning purposes.

On that note, I wanted to remind everyone that our stated meeting night dinners are provided by the Lodge and its budget as well as the cost at the door. We still have an honor system and I feel it is important to remind everyone that we have this system in place. Simply put, the cost for one person at our dinner is \$15, however, if you cannot afford to pay for your dinner for whatever reason, you have the right to sit and eat with us as a brother and a member of our Lodge. We do not want anyone to miss the dinners because they feel they cannot afford to pay for the dinners. That being said, if you wish to pay more than the \$15, you are welcome to add to the price for your dinner and maybe help cover another brother who could not pay. So, please do not be discouraged by the price of dinner or feel you cannot attend. Come and join us and help to strengthen the bond that we have as a fraternity. Also, at \$15 for what George prepares for us--it's a steal!

Lastly, many have heard me say that we will no longer have food after 1st and 2nd degrees. I would like to clarify. First, I am not going to do away with the snack or pie or ice cream and coffee after the 1st and 2nd degree, quite the contrary, I plan to continue this tradition. It is also my goal to encourage the brethren to start to spend time together outside of the Lodge in addition to inside the Lodge and the time following a Degree is perfect for that. Since we normally conclude our Degrees around 10 pm or 11 pm, it does not make sense to have a full meal and to be honest, it's not that healthy. That being said, I am going to stop the excessive spending that has grown into a meal after each and every degree. Each time we do this, it costs the Lodge over \$100. If we continue to spend more than \$100 after every degree, you can imagine the effect it will have on our ability to do other things we have planned for the year. We will however, continue to have a dinner following the 3rd Degree to welcome in our newly raised brethren, however, on the 1st and 2nd Degrees, we will keep it sweet and simple--pie, cake or ice cream and coffee or hot chocolate. That sounds good to me!

Fraternally,
Jonathan P. Dilley, Worshipful Master

The Light of Other Days

Over the next few months, I plan to use my voice in the West as Senior Warden to look more closely at various words and symbols related to Freemasonry in hopes of giving deeper insight into our ritual. Perhaps the most dramatic symbol in all of Masonry is that of light. We seek light in Masonry's First Degree, then seek further light as we progress. The most dramatic moment of initiation involves the revelation of light. We talk about the Three Great Lights of Masonry. But what is this light? Is it the literal light the candidate perceives? Is it the light of knowledge? Is it the Three Great Lights? Is it a deeper, symbolic light? And, on a more subtle note, has this light meant the same thing to all brethren who have come before? Have their eyes perceived light in the same way, or have their experiences varied over the centuries, even if the ritual has not? To briefly consider the meaning of Masonic light: Since the E.A. rite refers to Genesis, the light can represent the radiance of the act of creation, the birth of the candidate's Masonic life and world. However, since the candidate later seeks further light in Masonry, it cannot be only the light of creation, but the light of some continuing process: that of enlightenment. I suggest that light, for Masons, comes in three main types: spiritual light, moral light, and rational light. These three perspectives on light are also important to the fascinating and mysterious history of light itself. I will focus on spiritual and moral light in this essay, and cover rational light next month.

As we will see when surveying human concepts of light through history, light has not been the same thing to all people at all times. Instead of confusing light's role in Masonry, though, I think this knowledge makes Masonic light all the more loaded with possibilities.

Before we go further with our discussion, look over these statements about light from various sources--some straightforward and simple, some difficult, some mysterious:

I am the one who openeth his eyes, and there is light. When my eyes close, darkness falleth.

--Ra

Use the light within you to regain your natural clearness of sight.

--Lao-tzu

The light of the body is the eye.

--Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew

The perfect human being not only cannot be restrained, but also cannot be seen, for if something is seen it will be restrained . . . no one can obtain this grace without putting on the perfect light and becoming, as well, perfect light.

--Jesus in the Gospel of Phillip (Gnostic)

Hail holy Light, offspring of Heaven firstborn!
Or of th' Eternal coeternal beam
May I express thee unblamed? Since God is light,
And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate!

--Milton, Paradise Lost

There must be an invisible sun
That gives us hope when the whole day's done.

--The Police

The ancient Greek philosophers also wrote extensively about light, which raises the question, Did light mean the same thing to Plato and Aristotle as it does to us? Similarly, did Masons of earlier times perceive and think about light in the same ways as modern Masons? And if differences across the eras exist, do they affect how light is used as a symbol in Masonry? To consider these questions, it will be helpful to review how various cultures and religions understood light,

and how our current view of light has evolved over time. First, however, a brief example involving color will illustrate how dramatically cultures may differ in how they perceive the world.

Egyptians, of course, had a literal belief in a sun god; although he appeared in various guises, for simplicity, we will stick with calling him Ra. A significant difference between our modern culture and the Egyptians is that to them, the sun did not symbolize Ra; the sun was Ra and Ra was the sun. Furthermore, the light of Ra did not represent spiritual substance, but was spirit itself. To the Egyptians, light did not reflect from the body, but physically entered it and was re-emitted through the eyes like radar beams. This was how vision functioned. The substance of Ra entered the body, streamed out through the eyes, touched objects at a distance, and returned information in the form of images to the observer. It is important to note that vision was not the sole, or even most important, function of light to the Egyptians. Light provided direct communion with Ra; the spirit of each human was the spirit of Ra's light while it resided in the body. Perhaps light was the animating substance of the universe itself, and life could only exist when bathed in the light of Ra. As Ra proclaims in an ancient text, I am the one who openeth his eyes, and there is light. When my eyes close, darkness falleth." Given this, one must consider the Masonic use of the Eye of Horus in, literally, a new light.

The Greek understanding of vision was similar to that of the Egyptians in the belief that light was broadcast from the eyes, but with one important difference. In the Greek view, the eye was its own source of light. In the daytime, this interior light melded seamlessly with the exterior light of the sun, forming a link between the soul and universe. Euclid, in his usual logical manner, proved the ray-emitting nature of the eye by showing that if one drops a pin on the ground, one will not see it right away even though it is in the field of vision; therefore, the eye must be scanning to and fro across the ground with its vision ray, and only when the ray makes direct contact with the pin does the mind perceive it.

The more the Greeks thought about light, the more they came to view it as a physical substance. For example, the atomists developed the husk theory of light, which saw light as physical particles which left the eye, touched an object, stripped a thin outer patina of atoms from the object, and returned it to the eye, which could then use the husk to form an image of the object (27). With such ideas, the Greeks began a trend of seeing light as increasingly corporeal, a trend that continued in scientific thought for over 2000 years.

In sharp contrast to the view of light as a physical entity, a strong concept of light as something other than matter evolved in a religious tradition that began with Zarathustra. Around 1000 B.C.E., the Zoroastrians (whose name enfolds the Greek word for star) developed a system based on a universe divided between matter and spirit. In this world, matter imprisoned and contaminated spirit, which strove to escape and return to a state of purity. Light not only represented that spirit, but was spirit itself. Matter was everything that gave substance to the world; light was whatever matter was not. It was the primal, holy energy, the ethereal body itself, of Ahura Mazda, the god of light--not in the sense of the god who governed light, but the god who was the essence of light. For example, before his birth, Zarathustra's mother was surrounded by a luminous glow because the presence within her contained the numinance of Ahura Mazda. This glow grew until, on the night of his birth, it appeared as a star in the sky overhead. For the Zoroastrians, the individual's soul was essentially trapped in the dark world of matter and only could be ultimately freed by association with the things in the world that contained the most light (such as fire, whiteness, moral purity) and avoidance of that which contained the least (darkness, material pleasures, and so forth).

Later, beginning in the third century C.E., the religion of Mani (the Envoy of Light) continued to develop the Zoroastrian light/dark duality, suggesting ways that the individual could best free the soul and allow it to return to the pure, heavenly light. As an interesting side note, Mani was alone among the major religious figures of ancient times to communicate his message through light, that is, through paintings. The Manichaeans developed an elaborate cosmology to illustrate the struggle of the light trapped in the world to return to its pure source. For instance, the moon was said to be waxing because it was receiving a column of pure light from freed human souls. In its waning phase, the moon was transmitting that light to its celestial destiny with the sun. Much of this cosmology continued on in the beliefs of the Cathars and the Gnostic Christians.

Elements of this tradition also were incorporated into Christianity, in part through the theology of Augustine, who was briefly a Manichaean before becoming a Christian. Seizing upon the many references to light in the Gospels, such as Matthew 6:22, The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light, Augustine encouraged the view of light as spirit--at first on a literal level, though this became more metaphorical over time as the understanding of light changed. More recently, Albert Pike reflected this non-literal concept when he wrote, Light is not Spirit, as the Indian Hierophants believed it to be; but only the instrument of the Spirit. However, for centuries

light and spirit were so intertwined on a literal level in Christianity that to suggest that the eye did not have its own source of light was heresy, equivalent to claiming the body did not have a soul. Even today, a vestige eye/light/soul confluence is preserved in sayings such as the eye is the window to the soul, and the soul breaths through the eyes.

Perhaps the most extreme separation of light from matter is found in the Hebrew Kabbalist system, a mystical arrangement that illustrates the nature of existence. For Kabbalists, there are planes of reality that exist beyond all possible forms of human observation and comprehension. The lowest of these planes is the Limitless Light. With this concept, the Kabbalists have envisioned the most perfectly pure light imaginable, a light so ethereal that it does not interact in any way with the material universe. Like the quarks of modern quantum physics, the Limitless Light never can be seen, touched, or understood by direct observation. Yet in mysterious ways, this invisible light nurtures the universe and the soul.

What, then, do we as Masons learn from all these ideas that seem so strange and unfamiliar to the modern mind? Perhaps this knowledge encourages us to think of light as something more than a tool that provides illumination. When we receive light in Masonry, maybe that light does more than allow us to see. Could it be that, like the spiritual light of ancient days, it enters and changes us? As we progress through Masonry, many things are revealed to us; how are we changed by them? Or, in other words, how are we enlightened by Masonry?

Fraternally,
Curtis Scott Shumaker, Senior Warden

Almighty God, light up the small duties of this life.
May they shine with Your beauty. May we understand
that Your glory may dwell in the most common task and
let us understand that there is no service to others
which is without value. We thank You for our opportunities
to serve and ask for Your guidance and blessing in all our endeavors.

Amen
Ed Calzaretto
Chaplain

FROM THE SOUTH

A Lodge of the Holy Saints John at Jerusalem

It may strike one as peculiar, the reference to the Holy Saints John in the rituals of Freemasons prevalent in American and Continental European lodges. An institution which is noted for its universality has, by this expression, taken on a significantly Christian appellation when it refers to its lodges as among those of the Holy Saints John at Jerusalem. Specifically, the homage paid is to Saint John the Baptist whose purification rituals at the Jordan heralded the mission of Jesus of Nazareth, and to Saint John Evangelist to whom many of the books of the New Testament were correctly or incorrectly attributed, but especially to the Gospel bearing his name.

That the rituals of the Masonic Order were developed by men who were typically Christians is a matter that cannot likely be disputed. It had been customary for guilds and institutions to adopt patron-saints as part of their identities, since both the Anglican and Romish churches had accomplished much to formulate social thinking and practices. The Baptist was the first to be attributed among the freemasons, as the earliest constitutions of the fraternity will testify, and the Evangelist was a later identification confirmed after the sixteenth century. Furthermore, the renowned Reverend George Oliver accomplished much to instill the Johannine dedication since his influence on the craft, for his copious and lofty writings, was great, albeit unconsciously tempered by a zealous, Christian theology.

What may be worthy of consideration is a possible reversal of adaptation. The early Church Fathers could not overcome the power of pagan celebrations which had been thoroughly engrained in the social psyche of people they had endeavoured to proselytise. These had taken the forms of equinoctial and solstitial rites as parts of nature worship. The solution, therefore, was ultimately to Christianize the celebrations; and their efforts resulted in well establish occurrences of the Christian calendar. Whereas it is expected that local traditions will influence Masonic practices in minor ways in whatever parts of the world lodges exist and, whereas, in English speaking parts of the world, Judeo-Christian concepts have been employed to illustrate certain universal principles, the Johannine references were never intended to enforce purely Christian doctrine. More likely, they were called upon to induce the Christian psyche to reevaluate natural doctrine as recorded in the Great Book of Nature and Revelation.

Saint John the Baptist, according to both religious and Masonic tradition has been honoured on 24 June of each year, which is proximal to the Summer Solstice, and Saint John the Evangelist, similarly, is celebrated on 27 December, near the Winter Solstice. Many of the virtues reflected in the two biblical figures, as revered by the Church, are universal enough to be appreciated by the craft, transcending the religious differences of the brothers who compose it. The Baptist was known for his unshakable faith and firmness of duty to God. His contempt for vice and an inflexible call for repentance were sorely narrated. Such ideas are not obscure to Masonic thought. The Evangelist is equated with Agape and its derivative Brotherly Love. An appreciation for mystery and allegory is inseparably attached to literature with which he has been associated. Here too, parallels can be identified. Furthermore, certain cabbalistic ideas may be uncovered here, as the characteristic Pillars of Severity and Mercy of that tradition respectively evince the attributes of the two patronized saints. Yet, what must not be overlooked is the general disposition of the fraternity for symbolism. Tools and implements of architecture and of the geometrician, indispensable to the craft and integral with common opinion about it, are tangential to nature and all her proportions. The Holy Saints John, at their decisive points of the Solar year, remind us well of essential balance and continuity, upon which the thoroughly Masonic notions of stability and eternity depend.

Fraternally,
Merrick Rees Hamer, PM, Junior Warden