

Searching for Truth

After 42 years as a Mason, I am still searching for truth. I have discovered some, and the most important distills down, I have concluded, to an essential truth... it is found when one looks within, not without, and it involves self-improvement, a never-ending process. The search is more important and interesting than the result or conclusion. I am not, though, sure whether that last veil which hides the next truth will only be passed when I die. I am relatively sure that when that event occurs I will still have questions that will not, and perhaps, cannot be answered. Whether the truths I have searched for have been veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols is still doubtful in my mind. I want to think that immortality is real; but, if I am honest, and I try to be... the answer to that question is for me is, "I don't know." Yes, I have heard and studied the question; but, the answer is elusive indeed. Perhaps Masonry is not the field in which the answer to that question lies.

When I look at Freemasonry today I see it rife with leadership problems, financial problems, membership problems, innovation problems, imagination problems, time problems, education problems, philosophical problems and a host of other problems, too. Mentoring problems, ritual problems, structural problems, consistency problems and believability problems, are some that come to mind.

When I first became a Mason I was told, amongst the first lessons in the very first lecture, that the principle tenets of our fraternity were Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. I have seen many examples of the lack of brotherly love, too many to list. And, I have seen little evidence of the relief tenet. To be sure, there are incidences when these are practiced, yet their universality is not so

solid as to make it unequivocally clear that all Masons believe and act upon these tenets. But, they are not the most important of the three Masonic tenets introduced to an Entered Apprentice. It is the Truth tenet I want to dwell upon for a few minutes.

The three Blue Lodge Degrees all focus to some extent on Truth, as do the degrees and orders of the York Rite and the Scottish Rite. But, we must take a look at the carriers of the lessons of Truth. Putting aside the never-ending debate about whether the Masonic truths were of Hermetic or even earlier origin, or whether they were consolidated and ritualized in Scotland or England in the Eighteenth Century when Grand Lodges were formed, because this is really not important, we need to look at the way the lessons or truths Masons are taught are transmitted. It does not take a rocket scientist to discover that most of the stories used are fictitious. And, even the symbols that are used, which are purported to carry special or specific meaning, are not actually carriers of those meanings in fact.

If a Mason undertakes a serious study of his “craft”, as I have, it does not take him long to discover that the story of the building of Solomon’s Temple, to which so much Masonic significance is attached cannot be verified. To cite just one example, we read in the Bible that Hiram Abif, a Phoenician, was an artisan in metals, not an architect. Yet, Masonic ritual makes him the architect of King Solomon’s Temple. The allegation, of course, cannot be proved one way or the other. There are not enough facts to enable us to say. But, it is a stretch to say the man was the accomplished architect of the building of King Solomon’s magnificent temple. But, and this is the point, the story presents Hiram Abif as an accomplished architect of the work. Truth?; questionable, at best.

In the Entered Apprentice Degree we encounter a place where something is buried in the rough sands of the sea (ostensibly the Mediterranean Sea) where the tide regularly ebbs and flows. There really isn't a tide at the Eastern end of the sea there, or the Western shore of the Jewish and Phoenician lands.. And, it certainly isn't rough, nor are the sands there rough. An almost imperceptible change in the water level of about a foot on the average day can hardly be called a tide. Stretch of the truth here? Could be.

Another interesting, and thought-provoking example concerns Solomon and Hiram, the sons of Kings David and Hiram. We are told that these boys became fast friends, and eventual Grand Masters at the building of King Solomon's Temple. That is highly doubtful, and Hiram wasn't paying wages out of the goodness of his heart or because of his generosity. Are there other plausible explanations for why Hiram of Tyre agreed to pay the mostly Phoenician apprentices and laborers to build the temple? I think there are. Sanford Holst, in his Phoenician Secrets, provides a basis for my speculation that the relationship wasn't as amicable as the Masonic ritual would have us consider. We know for a fact, documented in the Torah and elsewhere, that the reign of King David was rife with wars, conquest, expansion of the Hebrew nation, and full of bloodshed. If we are rational about the history, what happened is more likely to have been that David, having conquered his way to the borders of the Phoenician kingdom, and poised on the Phoenician king's territory ready to invade with his mighty army, Hiram decided to appease David, and Solomon, and buy his way out of the looming conquest. The Phoenicians, you must recall, were not warriors; they were traders and seafaring people selling their expertise to the highest bidder. And, in the case we are considering, avoiding their own destruction by economic means. Yes. This is

speculation and fits with the events in the story when 15 Phoenicians undertake to redress their unhappiness by trying to extort from their countryman the means of their own well-being once the temple was completed. If my understanding of human nature, politics and war is anywhere near accurate, my suggestion, following Hurst's, could be truer than the hard-to-accept idea that a foreign king would spend his fortune helping another warrior king build a temple. But, the truth is tough to discern here.

The point of all this is that our Masonic stories don't actually square with the probable truth.

In today's world, at least where we exist, information is all too readily available. And, potential candidates for Freemasonry do, we know, much research online before seeking admission. Many probably discover that the foundations of Masonry are just figments of someone's imagination or modification of history or facts to fit some pretext. And, many, finding this possibility convincing, decide that Masonry doesn't measure up to what it says is one of its principle tenets.

Now... having suggested this possibility, and not wanting to be a heretic, or too controversial, let me say this; even though not factual, the stories can, and do, in my opinion, carry important lessons about social and moral values, even if not built on true stories. We need to be aware, however, that, while we claim not to be a religion, our frank admission that we build on religious, often Christian concepts (though not only those), and that we are religion's handmaidens, places us in a precarious position in the minds of those who want facts, not fantasy to be at the root of their beliefs.

Let me address this truth business from another perspective. The very powerful argument has been made that the essence of Freemasonry and its value and fascination lies in its use of symbolism, according to Albert Pike, one celebrated Mason. This man wrote volumes on the meaning and import of symbols and symbolism used in Masonry... and even claimed that he had discovered knowledge, based on the use of symbolism used by ancient cultures and philosophers that had been lost. Those who have read *Morals and Dogma*, *Esoterika*, and others of Pike's many tomes know that Albert Pike had a very active imagination. And, he applied specific meanings to specific symbols. And, he convinced many distinguished Masons here and in England, that his interpretation of symbols was true.

He alleged, for example that a square, to which Masons attach the idea of morality, was a symbol for flatness, because in his mind it could not be used to measure arcs or spherical things. This points to his low understanding of geometry and the many uses of a square. And, he ascribed to the compasses the task of measuring spherical or round objects...and then goes on to say unequivocally what these tools, qua symbols, mean. Of course, he alleges to present the truth of his allegations in tortuously voluminous writings, all of which come out of his imagination, his study of ancient languages and cultures and his understanding of the uses the Hermetic philosophers and mystics ascribed to them. In reading Pike's works, which I have just concluded for the second time, I decide that most of it is sheer nonsense and gibberish. And, I called to mind Kuhn's book *The Structure of the Scientific Revolution*, wherein the use of paradigms is discussed at length. And, I recall, too, the concepts of heuristics and mnemonics. Symbols can mean whatever one wants them to mean; anyone can ascribe to any symbol a meaning that

works for him, and use it as a memory aid, mnemonic or learning aid. To suggest that there is some intrinsic meaning attached to any given symbol flies in the face of reason. It just isn't so. Any symbol can be given many meanings.

The symbols used in the Kabbala, for example, and the meanings they carried for the people using this paradigm, while useful, only carried the meaning they ascribed to it. The symbols have no inherent or intrinsic meanings, only ascribed meanings. And, therefore, only adepts could know what they meant. In this sense they had secret knowledge, but not anything more. If you follow this idea to its core you can understand that the only secrets that were lost, and lost to us, were the secrets the adepts ascribed to the symbols. In essence, they had no real knowledge that was lost to us, only assigned special knowledge they alone knew. And, what uses this special "knowledge" had was only ephemeral.

Among the more enigmatic of Pike's assignments of meanings to symbols is this one. The assassins' instruments, ostensibly the 24-inch gage, square, and setting maul (or mallet) as symbols for Pike represented, as explicitly stated in his Esoterika, are: the 24-inch gage represents "the rule of steel" or "church" (which, though a Christian, Pike found to be oppressive). To Pike the square as a symbol in the ruffian's hands was, symbolically, "despotism." And, the symbol of the setting maul, "brute force." One can understand these attributions within the context of the Masonic ritual and fiction of the Third Degree. But, is there any truth to these assertions? I think not. It is nothing less than the over-active political viewpoint of a Mason obsessed with ideas which are hard to align with truthful thinking, except in the mind of a self-trained lawyer. There is no discernable or actual truth in them.

Human history is replete with this kind of mumbo-jumbo, and Masonry is not immune to it. But, it does adversely impact the thought of a Mason in search of Truth. He won't find it in this sort of realm where truth and symbolism is what one man says it should be.

So. How does one find truth? One must begin by not internalizing the idea that symbols have any intrinsic, set meaning. Proceed to recognizing that throughout human history paradigms, models to help organize hard-to-corner ideas or systems, or express complicated concepts, Freemasonry for one example, are only mechanisms, like symbols, for helping us think about relationships and concepts, values and theories, or subjects that are not concrete, like morals, or religion. And, paradigms change, and often do. The Kabbala was an ancient paradigm, a model, on which Hebrews and kabbalists hung their thoughts about how their world was organized and functioned, in the same way that the paradigm of string theory can and is used to hang an approach to unification of sub-atomic and macro-sized worlds today. They are only structures for organizing things, and carry no essential meaning themselves. But, what about the truth? Scientific truth is relatively easy to find and verify, not always, but often. The scientific method has proved to be useful. When it comes to Masonry, to life, politics and religion, the method is harder. The paradigm has yet to be found that can help understand the ineffable, God. Religion? There are so many religions because the paradigm for religious thinking has yet to be found. And, Freemasonry? The only paradigm I can offer...look inside yourself and continually improve. We are limited by design, I suspect, in this area.

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