

OBSERVATIONS OF DEATH IN FREEMASONRY, THE ROYAL ARCH EXALTATION, AND ROSICRUCIAN SCIENCE.

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Death is the inevitable and the unavoidable shared by mankind, be it by its contemplation in the act of mourning the loss of another, or in the consideration of our own eventual end to life as we know it. The loss of my father, who was also my masonic brother in 2019 led me to search for answers to questions about life and death that are often not made available through conventional institutional religious sources. As esoteric explanation and philosophy oftentimes resonate with my sixth sense the best, I endeavored then to search the fraternal organizations of which I am a member to seek answers, perhaps beyond being told that one is in heaven with God once they have passed away.

There is no easy way to approach the subject of death as its truths will be varied among divided and subdivided religions and philosophies with modifications made individually perhaps by intuition or experience. In the end, we decide on our own realities when it comes to the meaning of life and the purpose of death. As my chosen search for more information was driven by the heart, I resolved, to the best of my ability, to utilize bonified and

accredited sources to compile a larger picture of the scheme of the ending of a life. I do not present the following as solitary or ultimate solutions or definitive truths. Understandingly, and rightfully so, all will naturally gravitate to the religious beliefs or schools of philosophy that fits them best to their satisfaction and resonates an intuitive harmony within their souls and spirits.

Here then, I will present facets of life and death within Freemasonry, The Royal Arch of the York Rite, and the philosophy and some teachings of the Rosicrucian occult sciences mostly dating around the turn of the century as sourced. All may not agree with some of this latter information that would fall under the category of source material of "practitioner of philosophies". An open mind, nonetheless, still stands to potentially be enriched. As this subject matter lends much to be further explored, my intent is to set a landscape or pathway that seems to exist progressively within these three groups. By this, I do not mean in the way of religion, but in spirituality. The focus from Masonry to the Royal Arch to the Rosicrucian doctrines provide an ever-increasing focus on the spiritual nature of the world we live in and both that which is, and that which is not, easily perceived. Each organization has something definitive to say about death and afterlife. It is my hope that the following considerations may provide solace to those who may be seeking it.

To begin my research figuratively "on the square", I looked to The Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Albert G. Mackey for its entry on the word "death". It states," But the Masonic idea of death, like the Christian's, is accompanied with no gloom, because it is

represented only as a sleep, from whence we awaken into another life. Among the ancients, sleep and death were fabled as twins". (1) It further goes on, "The Ancient Mysteries were based upon the dogma of eternal life, and their initiations were intended to represent a resurrection. Masonry, deriving its system of symbolic teachings from these ancient religious associations, presents death to its neophytes as the gate entrance to eternal existence. To teach the doctrine of immortality is the great object of the Third Degree". (2)

This afterlife, or enduring existence, is beautifully eluded to in the symbology of the Accacia Sprig or evergreen as the Grand Lodge F.&A.M. of California Funeral Service imparts: "This Evergreen, which once marked the temporary resting place of one illustrious in masonic history, is an emblem of our enduring faith in the immortality of the soul. By it we are reminded that we have an imperishable part within us, which shall survive all earthly existence, and which will never, never die". (3) Of note here as well, within the service's text, is the mentioning of the Silver Cord that is "loosed" in speaking of the ending of a brother's life. This will be explored further upon examining some Rosicrucian teachings.

- (1) Mackey, Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, Page 198
- (2) Mackey, Page 198
- (3) Ca. Grand Lodge Funeral Service, Page 15

Although Masonry certainly does not shy away from or avoid the concept of death, as evidenced in the skull and crossbones that adorn chambers of reflection, third degree tracing boards, and

exist elsewhere ceremoniously to remind the individual of a common inevitable we all share, and the subsequent call to labor well spent in good endeavors while still in our bodies before we perish leaving our frame behind us, Masonry stops short of expounding too greatly on the crossover to the next life to follow. Perhaps even though Masonry does acknowledge an afterlife, as evidenced in Masonic writings, as Masonry is not a religion but is, as it is often called "religion's handmaiden", it leaves the individual masons, with their respective monotheistic religions, to consider the matter further themselves. This allows for nondenominational as well as other religions' participation in the craft without conflict.

Masonry shows the end game of death, and therefore the reuniting with God, to be the motivating prime factor in the need to emphasize the importance of focus on our individual potential for best preparations in life for this event. Masonry teaches us to work hard through our stages in life to improve ourselves and not to be idle in working towards being favorable in the sight of the All Seeing Eye. Also, to be respectful to the body and soul we have been graciously bestowed in this lifetime. The skull symbol reminds and celebrates that which houses our knowledge and mental potential, and that which keeps safe what can self-actuate after self-realization should it occur. As for Freemasonry compared with religion, it is clearly stated for instance by the Masonic Service Association of North America that: "Freemasonry lacks the basic elements of religion: (a) It has no dogma or theology, no wish or means to enforce religious orthodoxy. (b) It

offers no sacraments. (c) It does not claim to lead to salvation by works, by secret knowledge, or by any other means". (4)

- (4) Masonic Service Association of North America. Statement on Freemasonry and Religion Revised 9/98.

If Masonry does its work by the square terrestrially, with its focus on the three life stages of existence, then the Holy Royal Arch placed within the York Rite in the United States, with its focus shifted from the square to the triangle, a symbol of the spiritual nature in life, moves closer to the threshold of our existence in its degree ritual. When the Grand Lodge of England united in 1813, with the Moderns and the Antients merging to form one new Grand Lodge, I believe that the reason that the Antients were insistent on the Royal Arch exaltation being included along with the three craft lodge degrees is that the teachings of Freemasonry's life cycles fall short of completion in better preparing us for and dealing with the terrestrial's finality that will reunite us closer to the Great Architect.

W. Bro. Lt.-Cdr. C.R. Manasseh, P.M., London Grand Rank- London Grand Chapter Rank, in his paper, *The Mysticism of the Royal Arch*, is quoted: "Now if the Royal Arch were not an integral part of Craft Masonry, the latter would be an incomplete teaching. In fact, it would no longer be mystical but purely allegorical, because the essence of a mystical teaching is to give man a glimpse of

what lies beyond death and to show him its intimate connection with what lies this side of death: birth and life are otherwise inexplicable as death". (5) The Royal Arch Degree, by its symbolism, attempts to illustrate a picture of the life after death. As with most pursuits of this ambition, some core reliance exists on the sixth sense and the writings and visions of mystics and clairvoyants regarding our existence woven into that of our creator's and the expected return to a state of being closer to our creator be it from, Muslim, Judaic, Kabbalistic, or Christian doctrine. W. Bro. Manasseh expounds: "It's (Royal Arch) ritual attempts to reintegrate us with the true and living God Most High, in the same way as craft rituals try to integrate us with spiritual birth, life, and death respectively. This re-integration with the Supreme Source in essence can only be achieved by a mystical union". (6)

(5) Manasseh, The Mysticism of the Royal Arch,
Yorkriteofcalifornia.org/royalarch/raeducation.html

(6) Manasseh, Yorkriteofcalifornia.org/royalarch/raeducation.html

Chamber's English Dictionary defines "Mysticism" as the "Habit and tendency of religious thought and feeling of those who seek direct communion with God or the Divine". For Christians, for instance, this would equate to the Communion of Saints, a fellowship between Christians living and dead. As mentioned, the Royal Arch adopts a triangle as its focus versus the square of craft masonry as the triangle is an ancient symbol of spirituality. Its three sides being emblematic of trinities venerated throughout

time. For some examples: Sun, Moon, and Earth, Father, Mother, and Son, Mind, Body, and Spirit, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The invaluable concept of the triune essence is all throughout Royal Arch symbolism and ritual. There even must be three candidates initiated simultaneously into a Royal Arch Chapter. There are three principal officers representing the Priest, King, and Scribe of the second rebuilt temple of Solomon. With the Judaic belief that the savior to come would need to be qualified as Priest, King, and Prophet, perhaps the three principals, sitting in the East where the light shines forth, allude to the promise of salvation. The lost word of the Masonic Third Degree is recovered in the Royal Arch Degree. The ritual pointing its finger more directly at God than the three degrees of Masonry in that the ultimate truth is that God is truth attempting to awaken higher emotion and awareness of the three major discoveries of monotheism: God being omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. Most all religions and mystery schools yield the revelation of a divine name. They usually speak of the same deity with the name appropriate to the language and culture. Oftentimes, names for God are used as mantras, being spoken over and over in effort to achieve a closeness or oneness with God. These concepts will resonate with Royal Arch Chapter members.

The symbolisms throughout a Royal Arch Chapter are time honored reflections of man's integration or direct experiences with God. For instance, the Kabbalistic mysticism reflected in the seal of Solomon. Also, a perhaps shared mysticism between the Hebraic Merkabah vision of Ezekiel (Ezekiel Chapter 1); and the

Christian Apocalyptic Vision of Saint John (Revelation, Chapter 4). Both of these sharing in the mystical vision of the Shekinah Glory or Divine Immanence riding in an incandescent chariot of flames drawn by the same Angelic Beasts: The Lion, The Ox, The Man, and The Eagle. (7) These are displayed on the four banners in the Royal Arch Chapter representing the four leading tribes of Israel who ruled over the North, South, East, and West during the Exodus (Numbers, Chapter 2).

Prestigious Masonic author and philosopher Walter Leslie Wilmshurst (1867-1939) in his book *The Meaning of Masonry* has this to say of the Royal Arch: "The Royal Arch is the natural conclusion and fulfillment of the Third Degree. The latter inculcates the necessity of mystical death and dramatizes the process of such death and revival therefrom into newness of life. The Royal Arch carries the process a stage farther by showing its fulfillment in the "exaltation" or apotheosis of him who has undergone it. The Master Mason's Degree might be said to be represented in terms of Christian theology by the formula "He suffered and was buried and rose again", whilst the equivalent of the exaltation ceremony is "He is ascended into heaven". (8) In common with all Masonic initiations, the purpose is to raise consciousness from lower levels. Wilmshurst further states:" No Higher level of attainment is possible than that in which the human merges in the Divine Consciousness and knows as God knows. And that being the level of which the Order of the Royal Arch treats ceremonially, it follows that Masonry as a sacramental system reaches its climax and conclusion in that Order". (9)

(7) Ezekiel i, 10 & Revelation iv,7

(8) Wilmshurst, The Meaning of Freemasonry, Page 140

(9) Wilmshurst, Pages 140-141

It is thought that a living soul can achieve progress and development through the realization of not a literal, but mystical death. This can open the window to the understanding of true life and therefore a better recognition of death as it fits into the mosaic of Divine Will and the inevitability of the finality of current existence. This imperative realization through mystical death experienced through ritual to understand the attainment of a continued life after death echoes back to the Egyptian Mystery of Osiris, The Greek mystery of Bacchus, and The Roman Cult of Mithra just as Masonry has its exemplar in Hiram Abiff. All of these figures were unjustly destroyed to return triumphant. Like these, but perhaps of greatest example, was Master Jesus, who emerged from death transmuted into triumphant splendor.

There is a logic that if an unborn infant cannot yet know the world it will be born to, even though it is technically present there, that upon its initiation by birth it will then follow with the birth of its spiritual consciousness. It occurs to me here that if death can be

no surprise due to its unavoidable eventuality, who is to say if what comes after will not be a surprise indeed! A newborn baby is surprised at first during birth by having been ostracized from the protective aquatic environment of its mother's womb, nose plugs removed, umbilical cord cut, and eyes opened to a new, or new once more, world with its change in environment and its new body to house its soul. Should we be wholly surprised then should our rebirth, if you will, into heaven eventually not also consist of a new kind of body just as initially foreign along with a new seemingly foreign environment at first experience, just as initially foreign as the earth birth had been? Perhaps herein lies yet another example of "As above so below".

The concept of perpetuity highlighted in the Royal Arch Degree now brings focus to the Sprig of Accacia buried next to the head, the skull being the final destination of our passion here on earth and the repository of intelligence and our spiritual conscious. The evergreen being planted by the head as a symbol of recognition that the consciousness of the soul-spirit will reunite with the heavens and continue to function, ever alive through divine providence. In the Royal Arch Chapter Memorial Service surety of the afterlife to come is summed up in the chaplain's final prayer: "Eternal Father, the Great I Am, with bowed heads and heavy hearts we ask your grace and mercy upon our departed Companion....and we await that day when we shall be reunited with him in your heavenly home." (10)

So then, Masonry teaches us of the terrestrial and life approach science and The Royal Arch through its exaltation ritual goes

further by taking us to the gate of infinity so that we may understand more fully, appreciate, and make ready for the end through enhanced recognition and therefore obtain familiarity. What then of the Rosicrucian doctrines of Death Science? Rudolph Joseph Lorenz Steiner (1861-1925) Austrian philosopher, social reformer, esotericist, and Rosicrucian, who sought out the synthesis between science and spirituality, shared in Johann Wolfgang Goethe's, (German philosopher, writer, poet, and diplomat (1749-1832) "World View" in that "Thinking...is no more and no less an organ of perception than the eye or ear. Just as the eye perceives colours and the ear sounds, so thinking perceives ideas". (11) Steiner had this to say of the consciousness of man: "The degree of consciousness once attained by man can never be lost, in spite of darkenings which occur during certain periods of transition. The human being in Devachan (the mental plane or heaven-world above the astral plane or lower part of the vast unseen world) has through his spiritual organs, clear consciousness of what is happening in the sphere of the earth.

(10) Maryland York Rite Chapter Memorial Service, 2018

(11) Steiner, Goethe World View, Wikipedia, 2020

Occultism reveals that the human being in the spiritual world lives together with what is taking place on earth. Thus, we see that life in Devachan, if viewed in its reality, loses every element of comfortlessness; that the human being when he ceases to regard it for his earthly, egotistical standpoint, can experience it as a condition of infinite blessedness—even apart from the fact that all freedom from the physical body, freedom from the lower nature in which he is enclosed here, brings with it a feeling of intense relief. The fact that these encasements have fallen away- this itself brings a feeling of beatitude. Devachan is thus a time of expansion and expression in all directions; there is a richness and an absence of restriction that are never experienced on the earth.”
(12)

The Rosicrucian teachings and philosophy of life are expansive. As the subject matter here being addressed has to do with death specifically, and in that the subject matter is inextricably in a triad interwoven with birth and life itself, I will not endeavor to go into areas of certain Rosicrucian belief systems such as Metempsychosis, Reincarnation, or Transmigration of Souls. Suffice it to say, whether we are considering several lifetimes or a singular life and a definitive afterlife to follow, the overall unshakeable belief in an immortal life akin to our maker, who is spirit, and in whom we have been created in his image, that we endure infinitely just as he in perpetuity. Let us then focus on the earthly final stage and initial transition to the afterlife and not stray too far elsewhere.

(12) Steiner, Theosophy of the Rosicrucian, Lecture S-1538, part V, 1907, wn.rsarchive.org

In the Rosicrucian "Science of Death" we can examine death as a birth. Max Heindel (1865-1919), Danish American Christian Occultist and founder of the Rosicrucian Fellowship relates "Death, so called, is but a passing of the Spirit into a larger sphere –a birth...The physical body is but a vehicle which the Spirit uses to gain experience in this school day of life. At the end of this life the Ego must assimilate what it has experienced, and in order to extract the best from its experiences, certain conditions must be prepared for it at the time of the severing of the silver cord. This usually occurs about three and one half days after death". (13) He goes on to relate the importance of care during this period: ..."Man's body is fourfold, consisting of the Physical or dense body, the Vital body, the Desire body, and the mind or Mental body. At what is called death, the Spirit withdraws with the two higher vehicles, which are tied to the etheric and the physical bodies by a slender cord... the upper end connected with the two higher vehicles and the lower end is still in touch with the Physical body. At death, the Desire and Mental bodies leave the Physical, taking with them but one permanent atom, which during life was

deposited in the left ventricle of the heart".(14) This figurative atom is the recording device for the individual's life experiences that will be carried with the soul to the afterlife. "At death the force of this atom leaves the body and all these impressions are transferred from the Vital (etheric) body (which is the storehouse of these experiences) into the Desire body, which forms the basis of the man or woman's life in purgatory and the first heaven. This transfer is done by the Spirit during the first three and one half days after the rupture of the connection between the Seed Atom and the heart, ordinarily known as death". (15)

(13), Heindel, "Death as a birth", The Light Beyond Death, compiled writings 2001, www.rosicrucian.com

(14) Heindel, "Death as a birth"

(15) Heindel, "Death as a birth"

Death is then not considered complete until this process has taken place. The belief is that the Spirit can suffer from inharmonious surroundings such as autopsies, embalmings, or lack of peace and quiet should emotional wails, for instance, disturb its progressing stages. When the panorama of life has been etched into the Desire body, having come by way of the Seed Atom, the silver cord is then broken, the two lower ethers of the Vital body gravitate back to the Physical body, leaving the

Spirit free to go on to higher realms. The two higher ethers coalesce with the Desire body. When the Physical body is buried, that part of the Vital body which remains disintegrates synchronously with it. It is for this reason that cremation is believed to free the spirit more quickly from its worn-out physical body than burial would facilitate.

“During life in the physical world, the human Ego works through its four vehicles: namely, the Physical, Vital, Desire and Mental bodies, all of which are connected to one another by a silver cord. At night, the Ego withdraws into the inner worlds taking with it the Mental and Desire bodies, leaving the Physical body, together with the Vital body lying on the bed”. (16) The Ego sets about harmonizing rhythm to the Mental and Desire bodies, who then works on the Vital body to make restorations to the Physical body through the dreaming process. “At death, the Ego leaves the Physical body..., but instead of the Vital body remaining with the Physical body, as is the case during sleep, it also leaves the Physical body together with the Desire and Mental bodies, for the Spirit’s work in the Physical body is finished for this Earth life. The Vital body has now a different work to do; It is no longer called upon to keep the physical atoms in health”. (17) This is why among the ancients sleep and death were thought to be twins as mentioned earlier.

(16) Heindel, “Purpose of Sleep”, The Light Beyond Death, compiled writings 2001, www.rosicrucian.com

(17) Heindel, "Purpose of Sleep", www.rosicrucian.com

The death process in the Rosicrucian Doctrine with descriptions and details of the four bodies of man: the Physical, Vital, Desire, and Mental, and how the two lower and two higher selves are attached to the silver cord and the process of detachment are somewhat involved. Although these matters should be pursued, the intention here is an overview of basic beliefs so I turn then to the words of Magus Incognito, pen name of William Walker Atkinson (1862-1932), American pioneer of the New Thought Movement, in his work *The Secret Doctrine of the Rosicrucians*, for a simplified and more linear approach to descriptions. Incognito relates: "The moment of death arriving for the person, the soul sloughs off the ordinary Physical body, and clad in the garments of the Elemental Soul, it leaves the scene of the Physical body. At first however, the separation is not complete, for the Elemental soul is still attached to the Physical body by a thin slender thread or cord, which finally breaks and allows the soul to proceed on its way. The garments of the Elemental Soul are of course, in a sense, "physical" just as truly were the garments of the visible body which were just cast off by the soul". (18) The soul then departs having taken with it the one permanent atom, which was deposited in the left ventricle of the heart during life, which has been the nucleus of the physical body ever since the spirit first took possession of it, its force moving the heart. "All the other atoms in the whole body must vibrate in tune with this atom. The

force within in moves the heart and keeps the organism alive". (19) It is described not as a physical atom, but the forces moving through it. This is referred to as the Physical Seed Atom that is attached to the Ego and is the recording device of the individual that will travel with the soul to the astral plane or purgatory of the First Heaven which will be judged and self-judged for merits of accomplishment in the life lived or lack of them. In the instance of belief in reincarnation, this will be a permanent part of the individual upon successive rebirths towards perfection.

(18) Incognito, "The Secret Doctrine of the Rosicrucians", Page.178, www.sacred-texts.com

(19) Heindel "The Seed Atom and the Silver Cord", The Light Beyond Death compiled writings 2001, www.rosicrucian.com

This slender cord, known as the Silver Cord, which ruptures at death, is spoken of in the 12th Chapter of Ecclesiastes: "Or ever the silver cord be loosed...Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it", holds the higher and lower vehicles of man's self together. Death occurs, stops the heart by rupture, and frees the Ego along with the higher and lower selves of man, and heads towards a duration of about three and one half days until the Silver Cord is severed. "During this period, the spirit is engaged in reviewing the scenes of its past life which have been impressed on the Permanent Seed Atom in the heart. These impressions have been left on the Seed Atom by the blood. We are also taught from the Bible that the

Spirit is in the blood. The blood is the direct vehicle of the Spirit". (20) Once in possession of the Seed Atom the disembodied soul then travels onto the astral plane, which is not a place, but a state of being, it operating on a higher rate of vibration not perceptible to the earthly plane and its concerns. It is important to note here too that it is believed that different planes can occupy the same space at the same time without interference. Then, "The newly disembodied soul falls into a deep sleep, or state of coma, resembling the condition of the unborn child for several months before its birth. This condition is necessary in order to prepare the soul for its life on the new plane. Finally, after the longer or short period of sojourn of the soul upon the astral plane- the duration of which depends upon the degree of spiritual development of the soul- there comes to it the first dawn of a new state or condition known to the occultists as "The Second Soul- Sleep" or slumber in which is coming to it. The Soul does not feel pain at the approach of the Second Soul-Sleep, but, on the contrary, experiences satisfaction and happiness at the coming of something which promises rest and recuperation". (21)

(20) Heindel, "The Rosicrucian Method of Caring for the Dead",
the Light Beyond Death, compiled writings
2001, www.rosicrucian.com

(21) Incognito, "The Secret Doctrine of the Rosicrucians" Pages
178-182, www.sacred-texts.com

This first and second "Soul-Sleep" described by Magus Incognito is not unlike the "First and Second Heavens" described by Max Heindel. The First Heaven is a place for contemplation of a life lived and reflection upon the Seed Atom that accompanied the soul in its journey to this purgatory to account for the positives and negatives of the life's accomplishments or lack of achievement in attaining a higher self with the aim of moving closer to God. This is the "Summerland" of the Spiritualists. Here the thoughts and fancies built during a lifetime are also experienced. The Second Heaven existence, with the journey to it known as "The Great Silence", where the Ego "awakes from the delusions and illusions of Earth-life with a sense of infinite relief, is filled with a feeling of impregnable security, feels anew the restful repose of being in the everlasting arms of the Great Universal Spirit" (22) From hereafter, whatever the duration and whatever the attainment of the Soul's progression, and whatever the destiny, the soul will either choose to live again should it be deemed necessary, or it will reside forever on a higher plane with no further need or desire for earthly existence. The Eighty four hours, or three and one half days, of time to allow for the process of the detachment of the Seed Atom and that of the loosened Silver Cord to be severed naturally seems of a prime importance. There is even a burial request form for Rosicrucians not to have their bodies disturbed by loud noises, embalming, or postmortem operations for the Eighty Four hour duration and also to request cremation, but not prior to the completion of Eighty four hour period. All this being in keeping with "The Science of Death".

(22) Heindel "The First Heaven" & "The Second Heaven", The Light Beyond Death compiled writings 2001., www.rosicrucian.com

The oft-times ambiguity or lack of detail presented in religious dogma can leave remaining questions in the mind and even doubts in the heart. Sometimes answers given feel lacking in detail or useful information and our sixth sense can be left hungered. By a similar fashion however, our sixth sense can be made to feel satisfied when it believes that it has heard, seen, or discovered that which it was in search of, or perhaps even a confirmation of what it already felt instinctively to be truth. If we have in fact lived before, or if not, if we all came from some place grander, then our sixth senses attached in part to our collective unconscious that psychologist Carl Jung describes as a collected storehouse of useful information learned or taught to mankind reaching far back in time to the beginning of existence, an ancestral memory and experience common to all humankind, drives our assessment and decision making. I have read more than once that if one is researching esoteric wisdom in their lives now that they are most likely continuing their studies from a prior life or existence in that they are able to move quickly through some areas of study as they already in their mind have come to know

and accept such areas as given truth without further consideration. Nonetheless truth can be subjective based on an individual's experience or lack of it. May we all feel at peace with our lost loved ones and may our lost loved ones all find peace.

Spe Vitae Servit Proximo

Source List

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