

Eastern Mysticism And Freemasonry

By

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My Brethren:

I consider it a tremendous privilege to be asked by Right Worshipful Brother Kwame Acquaaah to speak to you this morning on the subject, 'Eastern Mysticism and Freemasonry'. Right Worshipful Brother Kwame is a shining light in the temple of Freemasonry and to me represents the highest and noblest that our Craft has to offer.

Let me begin this talk by saying that I do not presume to interpret Freemasonry for anyone. Your inner journey is your inner journey. My inner journey is mine. Your interpretation of the ritual and symbols of the Craft is your interpretation and mine is mine. The beauty of Freemasonry is that it does not interpret its symbolism for its members, but allows each Mason to search for the truth for himself.

Our subject involves, in part, the mysticism of the East. Accordingly, the interpretations that are made today are intended to be "mystical" in their revelation. By mystical, I mean that the interpretation goes beyond the outer symbol to the underlying spiritual truth.

You may be asking yourself the question, as a Baptized Christian myself, what is there in my experience that qualifies me to speak to you this morning on this subject. I would respond by saying that it is my life experience. My life is my Curriculum Vitae. It is my life that is intertwined by these two golden threads of Eastern Mysticism and Freemasonry.

With regard to the golden thread of Freemasonry, my search for light took me to the door of Benjamin B. French Lodge # 15 in Georgetown where I knocked at the door and it was opened unto me. As with all of us here, it was at the door of the lodge that I began my outer Masonic journey to the East. I have traveled on that road for some 33 years and the journey has taken me to the Grand East in the

District of Columbia and in recent times to the higher degrees of our Craft as Deputy of the Supreme Counsel of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, in Washington, DC.

Along the way, I discovered the inner light of my Masonic journey. Consider for a moment one of the most ancient prayers known to mankind that comes to us from the Vedas. The author is unknown, but the message is familiar to all seekers after light and truth. "Lead us from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality".

Does not this passage from antiquity resonate with the first questions asked to the candidate at the altar of Freemasonry? "What is it that you most desire?" Is not the answer . . . light? In the Scottish Rite Degrees of Freemasonry, the candidate is told, "Ex Oriente Lux", Light from the East my brother and so it is with us". It is that mystic light of my Masonic experience that illumines my path in life and it is that light that shines within the consciousness of each of us that I speak to you about today.

With regard to another golden thread, that of Eastern Mysticism, it may surprise you to learn that in addition to my own individual search and research, much of my knowledge in this arena comes by way of an eastern mystic and brother, Swami Premananda of India. Brother Premananda was author of more than 30 books on philosophy and religion including such works as Light on Kriya Yoga, The Srimad-Bhagavad Gita: The Path of Pure Consciousness, The Law of Self Manifestation, The Magnetic Power of Love, Prayers of Self-Realization, and The Way of Wisdom and Self-Liberation.

Brother Premananda, who is now deceased, was a prominent Freemason and a renowned ritualist in the higher degrees of the Scottish Rite Freemasonry in the Valley of Washington, DC. He was Chaplain of my lodge and held many distinctions among the various Masonic bodies including membership in the

Royal Order of Scotland. He reached the zenith of his Masonic career when he was coroneted a 33 Degree Mason Honorary by the Supreme Council. Parenthetically, I might add that he was the first line signer of my petition into Freemasonry and my mentor.

Let's begin our journey this morning with this thought: "What is it that is the subject matter of both Eastern Mysticism and Freemasonry? I would answer that it is the individual! It is the individual who as a Freemason travels towards the East, the source of light. It is the individual who as a Buddhist seeks Moksha or Freedom. It is the individual who as a Hindu seeks union with the Brahman. It is the individual who as a Christian seeks oneness with his Father in Heaven. And it is the individual who as a Jew who seeks to realize oneness with Jehovah or Yahweh.

Without the individual, there is no philosophy, no religion, no reason, no field of consciousness from which to even raise the questions that we will pose this morning. It is thus the nature of the individual that is key to our understanding of the relationship between Eastern Mysticism and Freemason. It is the individual that is key to our understanding of Truth?

How then does oriental mysticism view the individual? The oriental teachers tell us that what we are looking for, namely Truth or in Masonic terms, "the lost Word", is not to be found on the outside, but is within. The blessed Nazarene expressed this Eastern teaching when he said, "the kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation, behold the kingdom of heaven is within." In other words, what we truly are, the word, the Christ, the Buddha, Atman, the Self, is to be found within the consciousness of the individual...nay, is in fact the essential nature of the individual.

The Eastern mystic would tell us that Jesus was not born the Christ. He would tell us that Jesus was the name of the individual and that The Christ was the name of the realization of the man Jesus. Jesus became Jesus of Christ Consciousness. Just as Sidhartha was not born The Buddha, Guatama was the name of the man. The Buddha was the realization of the man, Gautama. From this perspective man is on a journey to realize his real nature which is in fact his spiritual nature. Let me

quote here Joseph Campbell from his book An Open Life:

"These Eastern teachers are telling us is that there is a common consciousness which is our own ground and so in consciousness we are one; insofar as you identify yourself with the consciousness that moves and lives in your body you've identified with that which you share with me. The Eastern teachers are telling us further that the important thing is not what happened thousands of years ago when the Buddha was born or when Jesus was crucified, what's important is what's happening in you now...

What then, does Freemasonry teach us about the nature of man? We tend to think of Freemasonry in the context of the Lodge. If I say to you that I am going to a lodge meeting tonight, you immediately think of your lodge hall, don't you. But the lodge to which Freemasons belong is not only a place, but it is something more: Let me quote to you from my book, Inner Journey to the East:

The lodge to which I belong is not only a place to which Freemasons belong, but is a Lodge within themselves, a secret place where they have knocked at the door and been received as a Rough Ashlar, clothed only in the raiment of their Masonic character seeking greater light. Each day the ruffians of the world seek to extort from them the secrets of their well-being and, on being refused, strike them with the instruments of their ignorance. Yet, whatever befalls them, they are strengthened by their Masonic experience. Like King Solomon, it is their custom to repair each day to the center of their inner Lodge to draw their designs upon the Trestle board of their mind and heart. They have learned through Freemasonry to use the gavel to chip off the rough corners of their character and have adjusted their spiritual stone by the tools of the Fellow craft with the hope that their consciousness will ultimately be perfected for that spiritual building, that house not made with hand, eternal in the heavens.

What we have here is a metaphor, the metaphor of the building of King Solomon's temple. Freemasonry is not only a metaphor for living, it is a living metaphor. The language of Freemasonry is its symbols and ritual and because Freemasonry speaks in the language of symbols its message is inherently universal.

We spend hours and hours as Freemasons memorizing the ritual, which revolves around the building of King Solomon's Temple. In some circles, this ritual is called, the "savior's myth" because it represents the culmination or fulfillment of man's human potential. To again quote from Joseph Campbell,

"The myth of the great savior, for example, represents the culmination or fulfillment of human potentiality. In the Hindu and Buddhist systems, the point is made that this potential is within all of us... is that when you read the life of the saviors — Jain saviors, Buddhist saviors, Hindu saviors, the Christ — the same motifs are there, time and time and time again. Turn to the wonderful Greek mystery religions, and again there are virgin births, death and resurrection... The savior's death and resurrection becomes a model for the casting off of the old Adam and the unshelling of the new."

Do we see the parallels between the story of the death, burial and resurrection of Hiram Abiff and those of the Eastern Saviors and mystics? Hiram Abiff was the "widow's son" which symbolically alludes to the virgin birth, the same symbolism in that of the birth of Jesus. The virgin birth is the birth of the inner spirit, the self or in Eastern terms, the Atman. Hiram is slain by three ruffians. If we look at the names of these three ruffians we will see concealed there the Word of the Hindus. Hiram, the Self, is raised by the lions paw. The lion's paw also relates back to the story of David, the Shepard boy, who slew the lion. David was from the Tribe of Judah and Jesus is described in the scriptures as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. It is thus the Christ or in Eastern Terms, the Atman or Self, that is raising Hiram Abiff to a state of enlightenment. This is the same process described in the life of Buddha as he

sat under the sacred Buddhi tree for 40 days and 40 nights prior to achieving enlightenment.

Campbell tells us something else about our ritual, which is important:

"Now a ritual is the enactment of a myth; by participating in the rite, you participate in the myth. Myths don't count if they are just hitting your rational facilities — they have to hit the heart. You have to absorb them and adjust to them and make them your life. And insofar as the myth is a revelation of dimensions of your own spiritual potential, you are activating those dimensions in yourself and experiencing them."

In Freemasonry, King Solomon's temple has three levels: 1) the ground floor 2) the middle chamber and 3) the sanctum sanctorum or holy of holies where Hiram retired to meditate and draw his designs upon the trestleboard. In the legend of Hiram, and his resurrection, these there are three states of consciousness. I again quote from my book:

"First there is the lifting of the consciousness from the lowest state of identification with the physical realm, represented by the three ruffians and the slaying of Hiram Abiff. This state is analogous to the symbolism of the death and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In the crucifixion of Christ, he was buried in the tomb for three days. In the legend of Hiram, there were three ruffians who assaulted Hiram Abiff and he was buried in the rubbish of the temple until low twelve. The three days in the House of Death is also to be found in the Upanishads, where Nachikita spends three days waiting for death to arrive.

The second state is represented by the burial of the body in the rubbish of the Temple. Here the Mason is engaged in reviewing the states of consciousness in which the sensory faculties struggled while still in the darkness of ignorance symbolically represented as 'rubbish'. This occurs in the subconscious realms of the individual Mason.

The Third stage is the ascension or “raising” of consciousness into supreme enlightenment symbolized by the resurrection by the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, which is the soul. Here the Master Mason attains to the realization of the Word. The Self, the Atman.”

Let’s look at another parallel between Eastern Mysticism and Freemasonry. It is said that King Solomon’s lodge is supported by three pillars, that of Wisdom, Strength and Beauty. These pillars correspond in Eastern philosophy to the three constituent aspects of God. In Hinduism they are expressed at least three ways: 1) Brahma, Vishnu Shiva, 2) Sat, Chit, Anandam and 3) Consciousness, Existence, Bliss Absolute. In ancient Greece they were Truth, Good, and Beauty. In Christianity, they are Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the higher degrees of Freemasonry, they are the three in one and the one in three. In Freemasonry, we say that these three pillars represent the three principal officers of our lodge, namely the Master, the Senior Warden and the Junior Warden. An Eastern interpretation of these principle officers of the Lodge would be that they are specific centers within the body temple.

Let’s look more closely at the three pillars, namely wisdom, strength and beauty. In truth, these three pillars are within each of us. I like to think of them as the three primary colors of our soul. In Eastern Philosophy, wisdom is referred to as Juana, Beauty or love as Bhakti, and Strength as life or Karma. In simpler terms, our soul is comprised of the three qualities of wisdom, intellect and love. In Eastern philosophy each of these qualities forms the basis of a path or Yoga. Thus, the yoga of wisdom is Juana Yoga. The yoga of Strength is Karma Yoga. The Yoga of Beauty or love is Bhakti Yoga. There are other Yoga’s, such as the Yoga’s of Meditation which would include Kriya Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, or Raja Yoga. The study of each of these Yogas is a course within itself and we will not be able to dwell upon the philosophy behind each. Suffice it to say, that each of these Yogas is a path to the realization of one’s self. The path that one chooses typically relates to one’s temperament. Thus, for example, if one is a loving individual, one might follow the path of Bhakti Yoga. If one is service oriented, one might lean toward Karma Yoga. And if one, is intellectually inclined, to that of Juana Yoga. I

should add that one who follows the path of Juana Yoga is not an intellectual in the narrow sense, but is one who has developed the power to discriminate between that which is real and that which is not.

Let’s talk a little bit about the mind and its relation to all of this. From where I stand the mind and the power of reason is pretty much taught to us in the Fellowcraft degree. We begin the degree by walking between the two pillars on which are to be found two globes representing the world terrestrial and the world celestial. I interpret the meaning of these two globes as the outer objective world and the inner subjective world. Once inside the middle chamber we are instructed about the nature of the Geometry of the universe. The world is viewed as a being the handiwork of the Divine Artist. Note, however, that the “lapse of time and the ruthless hand of ignorance, have lain waste and destroyed many valuable monuments of antiquity upon which the utmost exertions of human genius have been employed”. In other words, the outer physical world is not perfect; it is subject to the ravages of cause and effect. Nonetheless we are told, Freemasonry has still survived. The spirit of man is eternal.

Which brings us to a discussion of Truth. Truth is one of the cardinal virtues of a Mason. Truth also plays a central role in Eastern Mysticism.

Mahatma Gandhi, in his autobiography, My Experiments in Truth, tells us “Not only do I believe that God is Truth, but that “Truth is God.” Under this definition Truth is more than just a correspondence with what we see in the outer world, Truth is the reality from which the outer world is projected.

The Indo-Aryans, who in modern times are called the Hindus, find the revealed wisdom of Truth preserved in the compilation of Sanskrit literature which is known as the Vedas. The literal meaning of the word Veda is revealed Wisdom.

Brother Premananda in his introduction to the translation of the Isha Upanishad enlightens us about these ancient scriptures.

“There are in all four Vedas...Of the four, the Rig Veda is the earliest. Each Veda has four distinct parts which are designated Mantra,

Brahmana, Aranyaika and Upanishad. The literal meaning of the term (Upanishad) is from Upa, near, and Nishad, seated. In ancient days the disciples received instruction in wisdom being seated near the preceptor.”

In the Rig Veda, there is a statement, “Ekam Sat, Viprat Bahudi Bedanti”, “Truth is one men call it by various names. What is Truth? Truth is “Ekam Sat” which translated means, “That which exists”. Truth is that which is real. Truth is that which exists through eternity. Truth is God. As Freemasons and in the philosophy of Eastern Mysticism, the search for Truth is tantamount to the Search for God.

What does this Truth look like in Eastern Mysticism? The Isha Upanishad gives us an insight:

“That (Brahman, the Self) is One. The Self is immutable and self-composed. It is transcendental. It is more subtle than the mind. It is beyond the limits of sense perception.... It creates; yet It is transcendental. It is far, yet It is the nearest of all. It resides within all, yet Its presence surrounds and extends beyond all beings.

All pervading, self-effulgent, formless, indestructible, eternal, illimitable, pure, untouched by ignorance, the seer, the omniscient, the transcendental, the uncreated is Brahman, the Self.

How is this Truth described in Freemasonry? It is described as what we Masons know as the “Lost Word”. This is the same word that the ruffians seek to extort from Hiram Abiff. My obligation for secrecy will not allow me to write down or speak about this word other than on the five points of fellowship. I therefore will leave it to each individual Freemason to draw the parallel and make the connection for himself.

Still another Eastern concept, which we find in Freemasonry, is the concept of renunciation. The goal of the Buddha was to free himself of suffering which he felt was a result of attachment to desire. He traced all pain and suffering to attachment and left for the world his formula for attaining freedom which he termed, “The Middle Path”. He compared

life to a wheel, which has been described as the Karmic Wheel of cause and effect. So long as mankind is on the wheel, he or she cannot escape the Karma of cause and effect. His solution was to place himself in the middle. Like the teeter-totter, one should find the fulcrum of life and live one’s life in total balance between the two opposites.

In Freemasonry, the concept of renunciation is symbolized by the common gavel. We are told that the Common Gavel is used by operative Masons to break off the corners of rough stones the better to fit them for the builder’s use. But we as Free and Accepted Masons are taught to make use of it for the more noble and glorious purpose of renouncing those “vices and superfluities of life thereby fitting our minds as living stones for that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. The house not made with hands I interpret to be our soul.

The final symbol, which connects Freemasonry with Eastern Mysticism, is light itself. In the ancient Gayatri prayer, the oldest known prayer of mankind, the seers enjoin us to meditate on the light of Self: “Let us meditate on that glory from whom the whole universe is projected, may he enlighten our minds”. The syllable “Ga” means power, “atri” is “that which transports”. The Gayatri is that which transports our consciousness into the realm of the creator.

Truth, God, Brahman, Father in Heaven, Allah, have been portrayed by all of the seers of Truth as light. Moses stood before the burning bush. Mohammed tells us in the Koran that, Allah is the light of the heaven and the earth; Jesus tells us “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of Light and our Vedic ancestors revealed, “Brahma, Joyti Smiti” God is Light! In Freemasonry we are brought to light three times and each time the light becomes greater and greater. Light is indeed the universal symbol of the deity and is the supreme connecting symbol between Freemasonry and Eastern Mysticism.

In conclusion, I have postulated that there are indeed parallels between Eastern Mysticism and Freemasonry, particularly as it relates to our ritual and the building of King Solomon’s Temple. The authors of our ritual whose names are lost in antiquity were possessed with the Perennial

Philosophy that avers the existence of a spiritual self within man. Like Socrates, our duty is to “know ourself” and through that realization we will come to an enhanced understanding of our relation to our creator. Perhaps one day we will stand upon the Mountain of Consciousness as did Moses, Mohammed, Jesus, Buddha and others and bask in the bliss of the realization of our oneness with all that exists.